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ABSTRACT

The booklet looks at both the problems and the potential of training paraprofessionals as aides in the education of handicapped children. The case for training paraprofessionals is supported with such rationales as the economy of using paraprofessional staff. Qualities of leaders in the field of paraprofessional training are listed, including that they are pragmatists with a humanitarian bent. Problems facing trainers are mentioned, and the lack of materials on special education paraprofessionals is pointed out. Variance in the relationship between special education teachers and their paraprofessional aides is considered. Several programs for training paraprofessionals are described, including those in High Point, North Carolina (Training Project for Paraprofessionals in Education for the Handicapped): New Castle, Indiana: San Antonio, Texas (Paraprofessional Assistance in Special Education--PASE): Omaha, Nebraska (Eastern Nebraska Community Office of Retardation--ENCOR): and Idaho Falls, Idaho. The career ladder for the paraprofessional in special education is discussed and finally, certain common features and cautions that designers of training programs should consider are offered. (SBH)

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# Special Needs Special People

# The Training of Paraprofessionals and the Education of Children with Handicaps

George R. Kaplan

1980

National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Special Education
New Careers Training Laboratory
Center for Advanced Study in Education
Graduate School and University Center
City University of New York

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# Foreword

In the classroom of a public school in New Jersey ten adults watch a film depicting a 10-year old child learning to use a spoon. At a medical research center in Tennessee three young women and an older colleague test one another on a sophisticated electronic device that measures hearing loss. A Virginia university's most distinguished psychologist tells 23 women and one man, each of them at least 25 years old with several in their fifties, of new ways to train mentally retarded pre-school children.

The variety is endless. At community colleges, in state hospitals, in foster or child care centers—almost wherever a person with a handicapping condition spends time working, growing, or learning—someone else is also part of the process of learning. To help, one must know, and to know, one must learn.

The adult learners in these examples spend their working lives with people, mostly younger ones, with handicapping conditions. They are part of a movement to spur the development and raise the quality of education of young persons with disabilities by improving the skills of those who work with them. Like many simple needs, this one somehow never struck the makers of public policy as particularly urgent. Doctors, teachers, and specialists knew what they were doing, went the conventional wisdom. They could pass along whatever they thought "the others"—teachers' aides, cottage parents, "non-professional" specialists—needed to know. This is the way it was, and stayed, well into the 1970's. The gulf between special education teacher and aide appeared unbridgeable. One had and kept acquiring knowledge and receiving authority; the other learned by doing, did as she or he was told, and ranked somewhere below the custodian's helper in the pecking order of American's school staffs.

This scheme of things began unraveling in the 1970's as parents, then the courts, and finally Congress and state legislatures sought a better break for young Americans with disabilities. With their mandates came a sustained, probing look at the professions that served them. Were they prepared to do better? What kinds of improvement did they require? Was

research providing anything useful? Who needed to know more? And what did they need to know?

The questions evoked many responses. Most have been salutary. The professions that help those with handicapping conditions are receiving more attention—in policy, in resources, in applied and creative intelligence—as the demands of a new era impose ever-heavier levies on them. Preceding the new policies and legislative acts has come a phalanx of parents' groups whose monitoring of the schools' performance has been hawk-eyed and ceaseless. New insights, better technology and heightened efforts in research have each contributed to the spotlight that now illuminates the education of children with disabilities.

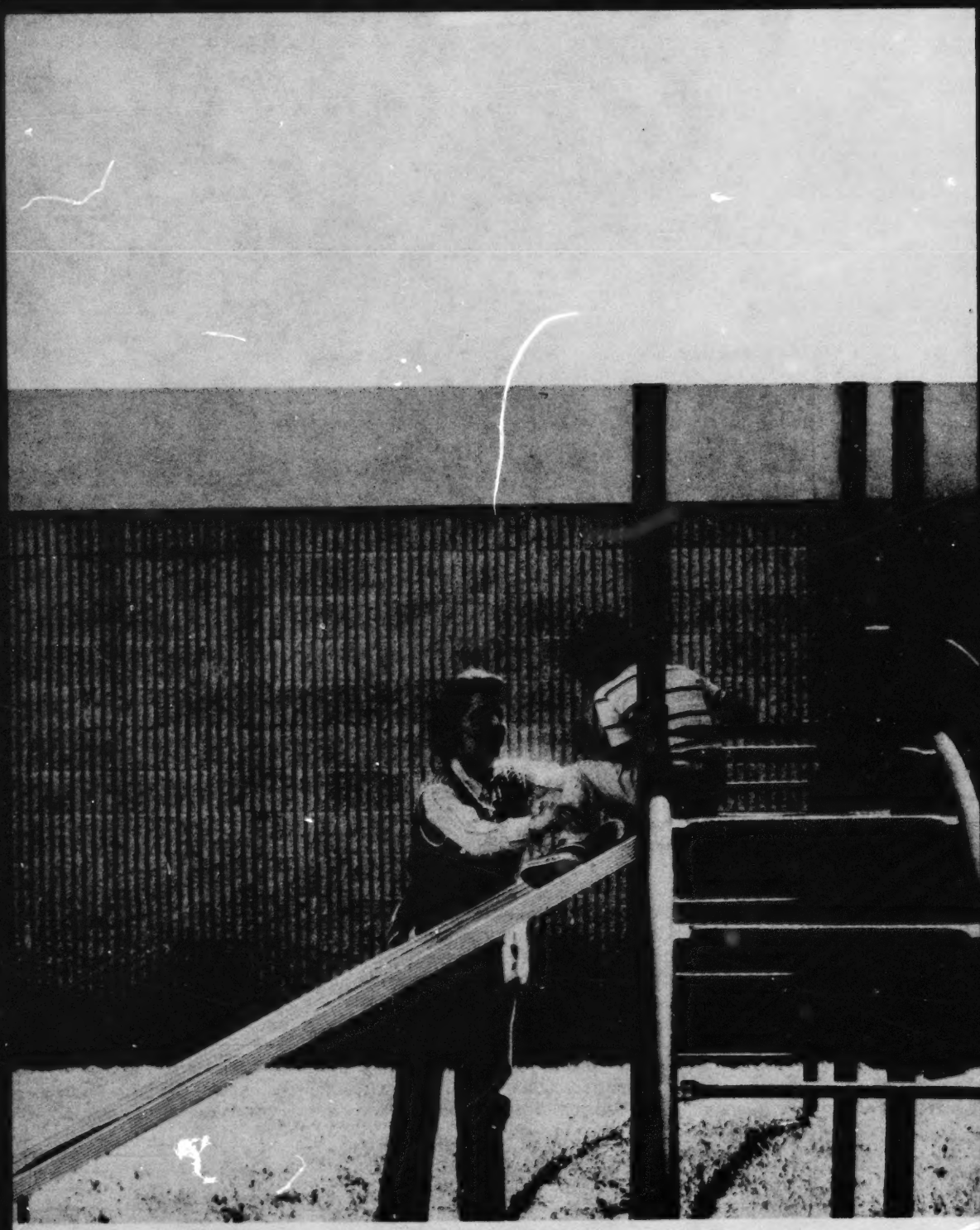
For the paraprofessional aide, the adult who may spend as much time with the young learner as any person in the child's universe, the emerging wisdom was hardly new. But it did lead to one irrefutable conclusion: if all children can develop mentally, physically, and socially, then the adults responsible for helping this growth to occur must possess the necessary tools and attitudes. The best way to expand and hone those they already possessed was through more and better training.

The message of the account that follows is that more of this training is finally taking place, although it has been slow to develop. Many aides are learning to accept more instructional responsibility from the teacher. Along with parents, they are becoming advocates for the educational, human and civil rights of children with disabilities. They are trying to help substitute rational expectancy for empty futility. And, perhaps hardest of all, they are learning how not to overprotect children who often seem to be crying for help. Training of staff, in short, does make a difference in the way children learn.

I am pleased that this look at the training of aides in special education is not in the form of a statistical survey or scientific assessment of the field. I commend its author, George Kaplan, and the staff of the New Careers Training Laboratory, especially Alan Gartner and project director Anna Lou Pickett, for taking a people-oriented approach and for describing the problems as well as the potential of this important and growing sector of American education.

William L. Smith
U.S. Commissioner of Education

May 1980



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# Many Can Find Their Place

**The child in his weakness has all the potential of activity which must grow in him....with the right educational and work techniques. Many handicapped persons can find their place in the world of work and become totally integrated in that world.**

Jean Vanier, 1974

* * *

Children with disabilities come in all sizes, shapes, and emotional and physical conditions. They customarily bear labels, some of them polysyllabic or indecipherable. They are "special". Their schooling is "special education". Even the most liberated mainstream American adopts an attitude, a kind of pose, in transactions with them. The sound of their small voices only rarely reaches the nation's ears. Putting himself into the shoes of the adults who emerge from childhoods of disability, a British observer wrote:

> We have a need for somewhere homely to live, for fulfilling occupation, for affection and appreciation, for a chance to give our best. We have emotions of sadness, happiness, anger, shame, joy. We believe we have the same rights as you to adequate housing, security, a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, and a right to determine the pattern of our own lives. We believe that we exercise responsibility to the same extent as you do. We do not abuse our freedom any more than you do; we believe that our record of irresponsible, criminal or violent behavior, of divorce, drunkenness, ill-treatment of our fellow human beings, selfishness, cruelty, or dishonesty, when compared with yours, reflects credit on us rather than the reverse.

With minor shifts, the statement fits today's generation of children with handicaps. Like most manifestos, though, its message tends to encounter indifference. It should lead to heightened consciousness, to sensitive public policies, to concrete steps to help make life better for them—but something is usually missing. People, resources, and social atmosphere must somehow coalesce, but the "must" too often becomes a "should" and then a "may." The strides that special education—more properly, but more awkwardly, termed the education of handicapped children or, better, of children with handicaps—made in the 1970's were giant-sized. The federal government and nearly every state issued educational and political bills of rights guaranteeing an education for exceptional children in "the least restrictive environment." They almost always had the authority of binding legislative acts. The field received prodigious, although still inadequate, infusions of funds, resources, and humanpower. Equally important, makers of policy in the social services became heavily indoctrinated and committed. National, state, and local political authorities boarded the bandwagon. If the magnitude of their investment, and that of the population at large, appeared wanting to the more committed advocates of the rights of these children, few could justifiably complain that it was less than a major breakthrough. The reactions of a former

Massachusetts legislator in the late 1970's reflected the attitude of a key policy-maker:

> This whole business (the Massachusetts law of 1972 and the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act, P.L. 94-142, of 1975) makes sense. It's long overdue. It rates our support. It's far from perfect but better than anything we could have foreseen in the 1960's. We'll stay with our commitment, but we're expecting the experts to do their part to make things happen. Money and political help are OK. Now it's time to make sure these handicapped kids get the best possible attention from the best people. It won't help much to pour money into schools and hospitals and special centers unless the people working there know what they are doing.

By and large, they do know what they're doing. In countless cases and places they are doing their job with great, if unacknowledged, distinction. Preparing specialists and special educators has become a growth industry for American higher education. Despite the many bumps and potholes along the way, the process of integrating young people with disabilities into "normal" educational settings has worked far more often than not—and, unsurprisingly, to the benefit of whole classes or schools as well as to the "special" children involved.

These truths said, there remains much more to say about the qualities and problems of those whose work habitat is the learning place—public or private school, day care center, residential institution, or whatever—where children with handicapping conditions go to school. Within these settings, the children are exposed to many adults. They meet teachers, therapists, specialists, student teachers, interns, volunteers, administrators—and instructional aides, also called paraprofessionals, auxiliaries, assistants, and a variety of other names.* The names share a strong characteristic: They show that their bearers work under professional supervision and have less stature than the credentialed, degree-carrying professional staff members with and for whom they work. The labeling is not intended to derogate what many teachers term "my most valuable resource". It reflects rather, what the "professionals" firmly, and probably justifiably, believe to be the case. Nor do the aides object. They are, above all else, realistic people who have few illusions about either the prevailing view of their academic qualifications or of their role in the classroom.

There is one piece of nearly private knowledge that the children, the teacher, and the aide share. It is that the aide may be as involved with the children as the teacher, both as a percentage of the time the child and adult spend together and, flying in the face of traditional assumptions on the subject, in a directly instructional capacity. Many children with a handicap neither can nor want to distinguish between the two adults whom they see in class more than they see (or hear or feel, depending upon handicap) any other. Whether the children are deaf and working on speech information one-on-one with an aide, or severely and multiply handicapped and learning to dress or move themselves, it is a safe assumption that either or both adults are teaching them, and in ways that skew professional class distinctions.

But there are distinctions, important ones that have crystyallized as the complexion of special education and the role of the teacher within it evolved in the 1970's. Even as they appear to be performing similar tasks, teachers and classroom aides *are* different. One is a certified, educated, career-focussed

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**Terminology in this field is consistent only in its inconsistency and will probably remain so for as long as education in America remains, as it should be, a matter for states and local jurisdictions. Without arguing the merits of each case, the practice in this manuscript will be to employ certain terms interchangeably while attempting to respect usage at local sites. Thus, with some exceptions, the words within each line below are interchangeable:*

1. *Paraprofessional—aide—instructional associate—assistant*
2. *Education of children with handicapping conditions or disabilities*
3. *Exceptional children—children with handicaps—children with disabilities*
4. *Training—orientation—preparation of paraprofessionals (or aides, etc.).*

*A further word. The field is overwhelmingly female. References to its practitioners will therefore usually respect that fact.*

professional, frequently the holder of two college degrees, who is responsible to children, parents, and the administration of the school for the conduct and accomplishments of the whole class. More than ever, this teacher is a designer of programs, a conferee with parents and a writer of reports. And he or she is a learner who must develop a close knowledge of the laws and attend to his or her own professional needs. The child may sense these roles and usually sees the teacher as leader in the classroom. In the world of the disabled learner, though, the aide appears to do the same things the teacher does—some of this, some of that, and everything in between—and usually with qualitative differences, if any, observable only by the trained eye and ear. In other words, either the teacher didn't need her training in the first place, or the aide is a superb mimic, or the training wasn't all that special—or both need all the tools of knowledge, technique, and compassionate communication they can carry. The latter is closest to reality. To examine how and why the paraprofessional acquires these tools—indeed, what they are—is to strike close to the heart of the processes by which children with handicaps receive their education.

The case for training paraprofessionals rests on several crucial assumptions about a field, which is still usually but inaccurately called special education, that has experienced a series of shock waves that reach beyond schooling. The story of the parent-generated court decisions of the 1960's and 1970's and the change in governmental policies brought about by laws passed to carry them out is too well known to recount. Suffice to say that it laid the groundwork for a revolution in the field. No longer limited to a narrow educational or medical base, the education of exceptional children has become highly political. It is a social imperative and an important issue of civil rights. It is a strong and largely successful competitor for a major share of the education budgets of federal, state, county, and local government. The parents of exceptional children demand that public institutions do better than they have in the past, and they have both the courts and legislative acts to back them.

How do the new demands and expectations affect aides, specifically those who labor in the trenches with the children? Put in the unvarnished language of a small group of classroom assistants attending the first national conference on paraprofessionals in special education in 1979, the demands soar while the expectations sag:

> For one thing, we just plain do more. The teachers do their darndest, but they've got to do those IEP's (Individualized Education Programs), see more parents more often, and go to staff meetings and training sessions that never seem to end. Even though they're on top of everything that goes on in the classroom most of the time, we're running it more than we used to because they're too busy with all the other stuff. Part of us loves doing the whole job. We could probably be good teachers, and the kids seem to like us. We didn't choose to be teachers, though, and to tell you the truth, we're winging it a lot of the time when the teacher is doing something else she can't get out of. These kids are too important for that.
>
> There's more to it than that. As we understand the new deal, we're just plain supposed to do a lot more with the kids. Keep them active. Move them along into regular classrooms. Try new things with the new equipment we're getting. To tell you the truth, we don't know enough to do some of these things, although we think we have a lot of good common sense about working with handicapped kids. Maybe we're beginning to shortchange them. We're under pressure to score successes, and we sure want to for the kids' sake, but it's getting to the point where some of those with the toughest problems are not getting enough attention.
>
> So we're caught in a bind that probably won't change for a while. We'd sure feel better about things if we could get more workshops and courses. They're sometimes available—at a price we can't afford on our income and with our family responsibilities. Maybe we ought to go on welfare; that way we'd have more money and more time. We love these kids, though and we wouldn't pull a

stunt like that, even though the temptation to do it or to take a job that pays better is always there. You know, if someone could figure out a way to get the training to us free and in places we can get to, and if they'd make sure it was tied to what we do, we'd have it made. It would be even better if the teacher could be part of it, too.

The case for training is solidly rooted. By no measure of the development of children with handicaps, it would seem, can even the prickliest budget-slasher doubt the wisdom of staffing the special education classroom with the best possible people. And yet in Maryland's Montgomery County, where average family income has hovered at or near the top of the national scale for more than a decade, the public school system in early 1980 proposed a two-grade (or 20 percent) drop in grade and salary for Special Education Aides whose title, in the transaction, would revert to Teacher Assistant. As part of the larger "reclassification" of which this action would be part, persons bearing such respectable but professionally unprepossessing labels as supervising central clerk, central records clerk, graphic arts aide, and school secretary III, among others, would acquire more prestigious titles and one- to four-grade hikes in salary and classification which would locate them far above the aides in the county's hierarchy. Coincidentally, these actions came at a time when the two-year Montgomery College had surveyed actual or potential employers of human services paraprofessionals, found them overwhelmingly in favor of a comprehensive training program for these workers, and had begun to crank up a responsive curriculum.

So, even where need is certifiable and "all systems are go", the climate can be inhibiting. And the statistics are grim. Of 3,000-plus postsecondary institutions where training could occur, no more than 100 offered anything in 1980 that began to match precise needs—of the paraprofessionals, the educational institutions, or, above all, the children with handicaps. There were more than 80,000 special education aides in the nation's public schools in the same year, and this figure would easily double if all private schools, residential institutions, day care centers and others serving exceptional children were to be included. Yet only one state (Kansas) had a full-time director of paraprofessionals programs, four had state-wide models for training them, and efforts in eight to ten were in various stages of gestation. Elsewhere, intrepid, caring missionaries had devised various shoestring or *ad hoc* training arrangements, but in no more than ten states had higher-level support emerged to reinforce or even continue them. With such uneven backing, and even less public or professional acknowledgement of the impoverishment of this vital human service, it is appropriate to question the case for training. The rationales are overwhelming.

- Countless laws, starting with the federal and cutting across state and local enactments, are unambiguous: Children with handicaps are to receive

more and better care from better prepared instructional staff. The staff and the community demand and expect this to happen.

- It is economical in the long run, in any circumstances, for trained, rather than untrained, staff to work with exceptional children. They will do their job better and derive more satisfaction from it. Trained aides will give more to an organization and its mission, and will seek advancement on the basis of qualifications and performance rather than seniority.
- New ways of working with exceptional children demand more knowledge of technique, substance, and equipment. The bases of all three are deeper and expanding rapidly. To employ the methods or the attitudes of a generation or even a decade ago is, at worst, to handicap already disabled persons or, at best, to deny them the verified outcomes of important new research.
- In many situations, paraprofessionals rather than teachers work with children suffering the most profound emotional, mental, and physical disabilities. Yet the aide often brings only common sense and self-acquired skills to what may be the most thankless task in the classroom. Despite an emotional inclination to say "that's enough," it isn't.
- The more skilled, knowing and compassionate is the adult with whom the child spends the time, the greater the likelihood of success for that child in reaching realistic goals. Not all aides do well. Those who have had training targeted to the needs of the children have a greater possibility of success.
- Never to be underestimated as a factor, the paraprofessionals *want* training. If they disagree occasionally on the kinds and emphases—some want single shot, task-based workshops as the need arises, while others prefer degree-yielding two- or even four-year regimens—they have long since achieved consensus that training helps everyone, especially themselves and the children.



# Pragmatists and Humanists

**Teacher educators have not displayed broad interest in and concern about P.L. 94-142, and colleges of education have tended to lag behind the public schools in upholding the rights of handicapped students.**

**Maynard C. Reynolds, 1978**

In a society of often realized ambitions, of theoretically limitless career mobility, we have come to expect professionals to exert a decisive influence in the training of those destined to follow them into their fields. "Do as we say *and* as we do" might be the motto of the leaders of most professional specialties. Even in the nation's much-maligned colleges of education few are the faculty members who were not at least briefly classroom teachers earlier in their work lives. This state of affairs clearly has much to recommend it. It is also less than ideal to the extent that it perpetuates the grip of a profession's "insiders" on the conditions and standards which practitioners are to observe. From our standpoint, however, it has two dominant characteristics: Participants in the training know what to expect, and their voices can ultimately, if not immediately, be influential in their profession.

No such conditions exist in the preparation of paraprofessionals in special education. They exist in a never-never land, a vital afterthought, difficult to fix institutionally and hierarchically. They function in systems whose main concerns for their professional welfare appears to be limited to detailed listing of their responsibilities. Nearly always at the bottom of the salary ladders of their schools and usually so in institutions and other centers, they are frequently the first to feel the pruning scissors when cut-back time comes. Few enjoy the dignity of 12-month jobs or salaries. Usually non-unionized and working on an hourly basis without contracts, they have little recourse beyond that which the quality of their performance, often a "non-qualification", or the support of a knowing principal or especially sympathetic teacher may provide. Their constituencies are neither visible nor vocal in the arenas of public policy. Kids with handicaps rarely attend the meetings of school boards, legislatures, or town councils which debate budgets and appropriate money.

The issue of whether aides in special education or their young charges do or don't have a place in the firmament of public policy is not destined to move nations. But it does affect the purposes, the style, the quality, and, most important, the content of the preparation of paraprofessionals to perform some of the most difficult and thankless tasks in American education. With little or no voice in any aspect of their training—indeed, in whether there will even be training—they take what, if anything, they get. Too often, what they get bears little relevance to what they need or do. It would bear more if the aides were part of the system that sets the policies and formulates the rules.

In 1980 it was not longer possible, as it had been only five years earlier, to count on the fingers of one's hands the number of thinking, concerned educators who were finally giving much of their professional lives to the education of paraprofessionals. A tiny band of true believers had become a growing corps of skilled trainers epitomizing a variety of organizational bases, disciplines, substantive approaches, learning processes, and educational values. Their expertise encompassed recreational therapy (Andrea Morris of The George Washington University), retarded persons (Shirley Higgins of New Castle State Hospital in Indiana), the human services at large (Thomas Rose of Montgomery College, Maryland), certification (Grace Hodgson of Santa Fe Community College, Gainesville, Florida), teachers as trainers (Richard White of Indiana University), the community college as trainer/clinician (Michael Davis of Ellsworth Community College, Iowa Falls, Iowa), the state as designer (Phyllis Kelly of Kansas, and Fred Russell of Idaho), rights of persons with handicaps (Trent Taylor of California), tots and toddlers (Dennis Moore of Sinclair Community College, Dayton, Ohio), and perhaps 50 more widely differing emphases possessing a common quality: the certain knowledge that whatever they did would somehow advance a field that had barely broken from the starting

gate.

The existence of a common quality does not, however, always map a linear route to truth or consistency. Some of the programs these pioneers have spawned are useful only in the precise settings and for the particular short-term goal for which their creators designed them, while others are global, perhaps even too ambitious, in scope. The trainers can meet only rarely to share their newly-minted discernments. Some are reluctant to concede that a similar program has real transferability, although some, notably those fortunate enough to beat crushing odds and obtain federal funding, were in more or less regular contact by 1980. But the federal grants were understandably minimal—the top figure for Washington's support of training for special education aides has hovered at an annual $1.2 million, with most individual grants clustered at well below $100,000—and there was no requirement that they have national replicability. That many are beginning to yield data and practices useful beyond the self-imposed limitations of the various projects is serendipitous.

There are no reputable statistics on the numbers and kinds of training that are taking place. The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Special Education of the New Careers Training Laboratory of the City University of New York has identified approximately 150 programs, but the figure is both low and incomplete because new programs pop up almost literally out of nowhere. A national conference, sponsored by the Center, in Austin, Texas, in April, 1979 produced participants whose institutions, usually two-year colleges, had been in the business for years but who didn't know anyone else in it. The 150 figure is incomplete, too, because definitions are flexible. Is a full-time two-year curriculum in "social" or "human" services a training course for paraprofessionals who work with exceptional children? Can the count include single day workshops in subjects and under circumstances dictated, for example, by an official of a state education agency? What about programs for the legions of mental health workers who work exclusively with children with disabilities, receive frequent jolts of in-service training, are considered to be paraprofessionals by doctors, nurses, and various other professional specialists, and yet have college degrees, five-figure salaries, and 12-month job security?

The impetus behind the training of paraprofessionals draws its strengths from many sources and rationales. They are consistent only in their defiance of categorization and priority. If there are several "givens" that propel the field—the law, the growing need, the fluid condition of special education, economic forces, facts of life about human services and the people who provide them—there are also certain far less tangible factors. These, predictably, are the ones that have to do with leadership, with the people who are, in the lexicon of Washington, "closers". A member of a rare and elusive group, a closer is, quite simply, the person who sees to it that a process, whether a training program or the construction of a school, whatever, runs its full cycle—honorably and effectively. The new breed of paraprofessionals trainer contains a fair percentage of closers. Not too many are dreamers, mostly doers like Phyllis Kelly of Kansas, the nation's only state official concerned full-time in 1980 with the world of paraprofessionals in the education of children with handicaps.

Here is what, with stray exceptions, the designers of programs and the trainers themselves—often, of course, the same people—are *not*: patient, research-oriented scholars, authors of standard texts, or tenured university faculty members. There are no medical doctors and few academicians with prestigious doctorates. Influential educational ideologues are absent. Politically well-connected educational policy-makers are only rarely to be seen. Senior administrators in the public schools usually "take a walk" when the training of aides comes to their cluttered desks. And there is a marked dearth of highly paid consultants and lecturers and of panelists or paper-presenters at the conventions of major professional associations. Educational publicists are nowhere to be seen.

To profile its leaders is to unfold both the merits and frailties of the field. If they are not theoretically-based scholars, and yet training in their field often terminates in a degree or some kind of certification, then what are they? The facile response should be that they are the antithesis of the things they are not. Usually they are. Specifically, they share several different kinds of qualities that may stamp them as a new, probably quite welcome,

breed in American education.

- **They are, far above all else, pragmatists with a humanitarian bent even though they are not now nor have they ever been paraprofessionals.**
  Nearly all have been obsessively involved in the learning problems of children with handicaps, although almost none are themselves disabled. As trainers, they are at home, too, with the views and products of academe, although they move in its weeds and underbrush rather than its groves. As trainer William Shinder of San Antonio College in Texas delights in pointing out, "I can be sure that, somehow at some point in the process, I'm going to have to demystify the material and boil it down into understandable, classroom-relevant language, a most time-consuming job. It's not that the aides and I don't respect the scholarly material on exceptional children. We sometimes even worship it It just isn't in a form we can use."
- **They can come from almost any organizational base.**
  Although the community college is the natural berth or, more accurately, switching central, for training the aides, it has no monopoly. Bernice Willis originally plied her trainer's trade from the Learning Institute of North Carolina in Raleigh. In 1979, she shifted her operational base to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro. Trainer Joyce Evans works out of the nationally known Southwest Educational Development Laboratories in Austin, Texas. Karen Faison's Omaha office is in the University of Nebraska's Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Center, but her work is statewide. Roger Cox, a vocational education trainer, comes from the Orange County, California public school system. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, Marcia Miles works out of a private firm, Southwest Communications Resources, Inc.
- **Most trainers are not, to understate the case, among the nation's educational elites.**
  Many do not enjoy tenure or its school-level equivalent. Their institutions and colleagues tend to consider them technicians rather than serious educators. They are scroungers where the training is concerned. That is, many hold full-time instructional or administrative posts and must squeeze training paraprofessionals, or developing programs for them, into schedules geared to other specialities and responsibilities. In what is surely a perversion of values, the trainers can often do their work only when "soft" money, usually directly from Washington or in the form of federal funds processed through the states, is at hand. They have learned to get along on less, or on undependable, funding. It is the children who suffer.
- **They see few rewards for their pioneering work.**
  Neither saints nor martyrs, they nevertheless profess an inability to understand the low priority and lack of esteem their work carries. They work for public organizations with publicly-mandated missions. That which is different—like teaching "that nice Mrs. Ramirez or Ethel Mingo" how to deal with an autistic child's cries for help—is alright as long as it's in the plan or the budget. There are no incentives and few possibilities to exceed either or to "end run" them. In some quarters of their organization their work may even be considered threatening. Too few enjoy professional tenure or even a modicum of job security.
- **Finally, they are concentrated in the midwest and the Sun Belt.**
  For unfathomable reasons, the training of special education paraprofessionals has stirred relatively little interest in New England, the middle Atlantic area, the Rocky Mountain states, and the Far West. These areas appear to be neither more nor less derelict than the others in their use of aides. They just don't seem to be breeding grounds for programs to equip them to do better. Despite the statistics, there are, of course, glittering exceptions.

# The Problems Trainers Face

**The stress that teachers place on personal qualities in assistants, or "getting the person who is right for us," strongly suggests that on-the-job training ought to go hand in hand with any formal preparation of assistants in a taught course. Informed assessment of experience and personal qualities should count heavily in selecting candidates for training courses and in recruiting assistants to schools.**

Jon Langlo, 1977

Over the objections of the free spirits of the nation, we are becoming a credential-happy society. While we cherish our long-established freedom of vocational choice and revel in the successes of famous scientists whose lives began in refugee camps or of lawyers who could as easily have become criminal defendants, we demand that our professionals achieve fundamentally agreed educational goals through prescribed paths. When we learn of a person masquerading as a doctor without benefit of a specified 12-year regimen of college, medical school, internship, and residency, we are aghast. The person must not only cease and desist; s/he must confront the courts and the outrage of the patients s/he may have treated without complaint. Nor would we dream of facing a judge without benefit of a trained lawyer whose "shingle" and framed diplomas are symbols of a system that demands that its professionals achieve and demonstrate precisely differentiated levels of mastery of their fields.

The society is generous or at least considerate, too, in guaranteeing that its potentially productive members have both the resources and access to the places they require to become engineers, obstetricians, social workers, dental technicians, or whatever. Never have loans and grants to students in colleges and universities reached the dollar levels of the late 1970's, and at least 95 percent of our population can commute to a postsecondary institution. If a business or a service matters enough to affect the economy or the course of a human life, says the conventional wisdom, then it deserves practitioners whose preparation has been the best that a well-ordered educational system can provide in most cases, anyway.

The training of special education aides has little in common with that of most of the rest of the skilled or professional American work force in 1980. It seldom leads to professional advancement and only infrequently to salary levels much above minimum wage level. It is usually administered on a part-time or, worse,

catch-as-catch-can basis. It takes place anywhere and at any time. Its participants cover all adult ages, personal backgrounds, and prior educational experience. Until a few years ago, it didn't even exist. With isolated exceptions, 1970 probably marks its inception. Even in 1980, only a small percentage of the aides had received training amounting to more than an occasional workshop or shapeless "in-service" day.

These are hardly badges of distinction for those who administer or are part of the education of children with handicaps. As the field gains long-overdue recognition and aides come to play a larger part in it, their training is finally getting into the picture. It is a unique kind of training, for virtually everyone in it is already a veteran worker with children with disabilities. She is their friend, their advocate, their helper and, as far as they are concerned, their teacher. And now, well along both chronologically and in her work, it's back to the classroom to relearn or rethink what a large accumulation of evidence suggests that the aide already knows. But as a paraprofessional in Louisiana put it, "We don't really know the new stuff—the law, the discoveries we hear about, how people do these things in other places. With the teacher doing so much else these days, we'd better get with it."

Get with what? Do the well-established disparities in this new field mean that people performing the same tasks learn different things about them? Are there ideological disputes among trainers, dissimilar theories about handicapping that affect what and how the paraprofessionals learns? Don't widely separated school districts or residential sites or day care centers have their own local versions of what an aide does and needs to know? Is there anything like a common core of competencies that can at least establish the *bona fides* of the field and somehow guide the aides in their quest for betterment?

The simple answer is that this grossly overfragmented field has somehow arrived at an

astonishing and strong consensus on the main substantive issues of training. The consensus becomes vulnerable beyond its core, notably when local training needs arising from special or less "popular" handicapping circumstances enter the picture, and when the matter of certification or college degrees, usually at the two-year or associate level, arises. It is less focused, too, in curricula directed to larger needs such as those for human services specialists or to specifically limited age groups like "child development associates".

These reservations apart, it reinforces the credibility of the field to compare the content of programs customarily begun in isolation in all parts of the country and to observe the remarkable similarity of objectives and hard information. Although exceptions abound, and the scope and approach vary widely with the projected length of the training, virtually all of the programs contain certain core elements, presented separately or in locally concocted combinations.

To get at the common substance of training for special education aides, it is wise to consider two additional elements that influence it: the descriptions employers use for the actual jobs the paraprofessionals do, and the competencies they expect these employees to master.

The two are close in many, but not all ways. Both tend to encourge rhetoric and exaggeration. No self-respecting employer is likely to minimize the requirements for a position within his or her jurisdiction, with the unsurprising result that job descriptions frequently appear inflated or idealistic. The outsider may also require a dictionary, or at least a glossary of terms, to be able to penetrate the language of the descriptions. "Feedback assessments," "resident program goal achievement," "treatment team developmentalist"—all these come from a typical specimen. Similarly, the competencies, sometimes in the hundreds for a particular job category, are often a cornucopia of great, good and unrealistic things paraprofessionals can but don't always do for their young charges.

At the New Careers Training Laboratory (NCTL) of the City University of New York's Center for Advanced Study in Education, the staff of its BEH-funded National Resource Center (NRC) for Paraprofessionals in Special Education has wondered aloud about how to organize the apples and oranges of the field. The product of its research and analysis is an uncomplicated Task Analysis covering the paraprofessional's activities, the conditions under which she performs them, the primary skills the aide must possess or acquire, and the special qualities necessary to work effectively. The example that the NRC has chosen, that of paraprofessionals working with people with developmental disabilities and/or severe and profound handicaps, is susceptible to easy conversion for use with children with different kinds of disabilities. As a training program it can be contracted into periodic on-site workshops, or it may be expanded to become a full-time one- or two-year college-level specialty designed to yield credits toward a two- or four-year degree. For the latter, the aspiring aide would probably also be obliged to meet the four-year college's requirements for courses in psychology, sociology, English, science, and possibly mathematics or computer science. It is, in short, versatile and universal. There are three main components of the training design that stem from the Task Analysis: skills training, core skills, and "know-how" skills. Broken down, the NCTL core curriculum looks like this:

## CORE CURRICULUM FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS IN PROGRAMS FOR PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

I. Insuring Legal and Human Rights
   A. Values clarification
   B. Treatment of developmental disabilities
   C. Handicapism
   D. Normalization
   E. Legal and human rights of persons with disabilities
   F. Federal and state legislation
   G. Advocacy procedures
   H. Human service professions and delivery systems

II. Orientation to Disabling Conditions
   A. Typical cognitive, physical, and psychological growth and development
   B. Defining developmental disabilities
   C. Orientation to the causes, nature, and characteristics of:
      1. Mental retardation
      2. Auditory impairments
      3. Vision impairments
      4. Neurological impairments
      5. Orthopedic impairments
      6. Learning disabilities
   D. Psychology of exceptional persons
   E. Strengths of persons with disabilities

III. Paraprofessionals as Members of Service Delivery Teams (with practicum experience)
   A. Effective communication
   B. Team approach
   C. Observing and recording
   D. Assessment techniques
   E. Data collection
   F. Interviewing
   G. Creating individual client plans, such as IEP, IPP, IRP, etc.
   H. Ethical standards

IV. Task Analysis (with practicum experience)
   A. Task Analysis process
   B. Writing behavioral objectives
   C. Behavior influencing techniques
   D. Skill development
      1. Motor skills, including section on handling client
      2. Sensory or perceptual skills
      3. Communication skills
      4. Pre-academic and academic skills
      5. Vocational skills
      6. Independent living skills
         a. Self-help, e.g., dressing, eating, toileting
         b. Domestic maintenance, e.g., cooking, cleaning, budgeting
         c. Community living, e.g., transportation, recreation
         d. Sexuality, e.g., hygiene, dating, sexual expression

V. Maintaining Safe Environments (with laboratory experience)
   A. Crisis intervention
   B. American National Red Cross Standard First Aid and Personal Safety
   C. American National Red Cross Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation
   D. Medications
   E. Fire safety
   F. Safety in storms
   G. Automobile safety

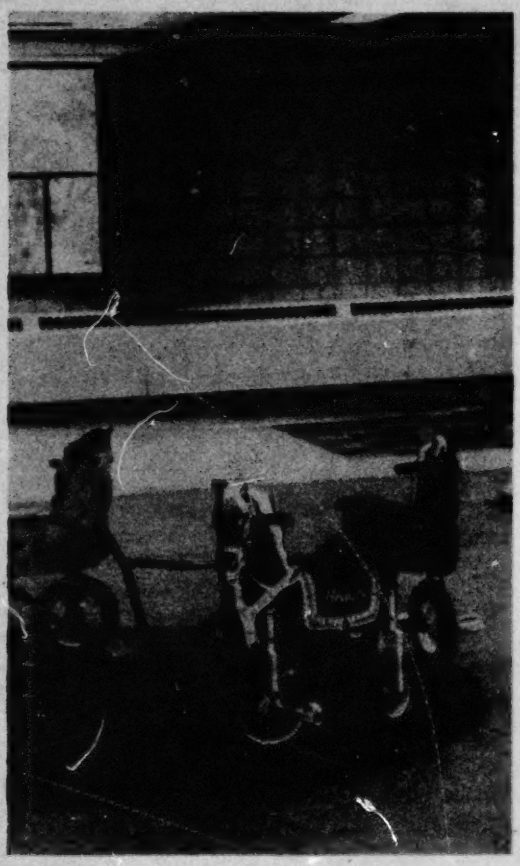
VI. Practicum II and Seminar

Work sheets accompany this curriculum for each segment of the NCTL training design. They are prescriptive but reasonable. For each session topic there are specific objectives, techniques, materials, and expected results. Task Analysis Charts for children with severe and profound handicaps are broken down along two axes: the activity and what it entails, and the skills that practitioners—regular and special education teachers, and special education and non-specialized entry-level aides—should have. The full package is portable, convertible, and relevant.

# Understanding the Shortfall

**The deeper we get into this field, the more pronounced is the lack of material that the aides can respond to. There they are—maybe 100,000 of them, or even twice that if you aren't too literal in your definition of paraprofessionals—and they're trying to do better at their jobs through training in material that was put together for someone else. They don't have academic degrees, and most of them don't want them. Why can't we have books and films that reach *them* and not a bunch of university-trained specialists? That's why we have to put our own stuff together.**

**Remarks at a paraprofessional trainer conference at Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1980**



If the quantity and quality of professional literature help to determine the status of an academic specialty, then the training of paraprofessionals in special education has a very long way to go. As the 1980's began, there was not a single widely available, commercially published textbook on the subject even though as many as 50,000 aides normally receive some form of training at one time or another during a typical year. A search of publishers' listings, reviews, and commercial advertisements yields an uneven but ultimately dismaying picture. There are treatises, often exceptionally authoritative, on the pre- and in-service education of special education teachers. Locally oriented lists of the competencies aspiring or practicing aides should possess often appear at the start of a workshop or orientation course. And the compilation of loose leaf-type "how-to" manuals by dispensers of training, usually community colleges, finds wide acceptance.

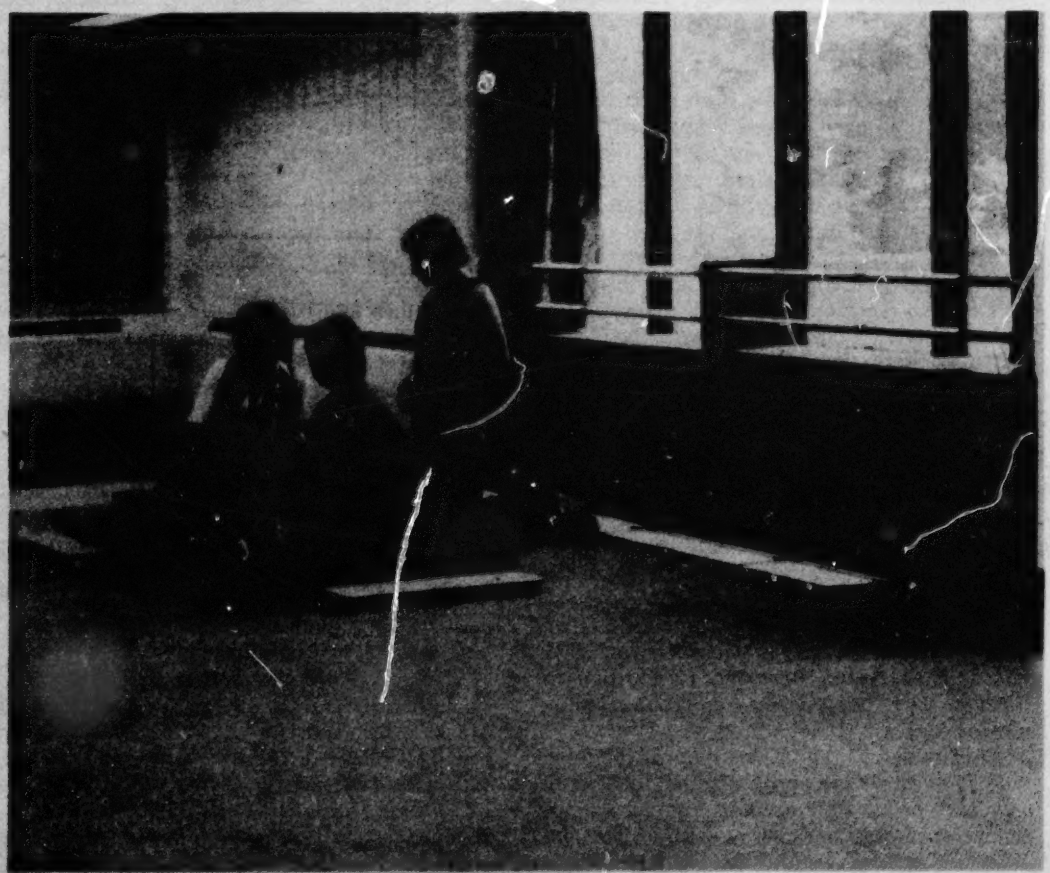
There are paradoxes here. The same two-or four-year college that forces five-foot shelves of literature on future engineers or nurses has few qualms about short-changing paraprofessionals in special education. In a media-obsessed society experiencing a revolution in video communication and educational technology paraprofessionals working with children with handicaps have virtually no access to films, cassettes, or other forms of non-textual materials designed to help them to help their young students. Mainly, indeed, they don't ex-

ist. Still in its infancy as a field, the education of these paraprofessionals remains grounded in largely non-theoretical, undocumented, hands-on practitioner-oriented approaches. But this is not all bad. It is possibly a mixed blessing in which the "cons" do not necessarily dominate the "pros."

The lack of a substantial body of solidly documented material in print or available through other media does not appear to disturb the growing corps of trainers of special education aides. Gene Lund, a school psychologist in the Idaho Falls (Idaho) school system, says: "Colleges usually teach to courses. These in turn are based on materials stemming from research which usually has little to do with how paraprofessionals do their job." In addition, many trainers attest, the processes of approval and adoption of textual materials are often laborious and tend to cloud the purpose and content of the course offering. Besides, as Elizabeth Culbertson of the two-year San Antonio College (Texas) points out, "we are not trying to make theoreticians out of the aides, nor are we bent on teaching them what they already know."

One of the principal features of San Antonio's rapidly expanding program is its berth in the college's vocational-technical rather than academic track. The developing program in the New Castle-Muncie area of Indiana, too, depends heavily for its academic underpinning on the readiness of the highly technical two-year Ivy Tech (Indiana Vocational Technical College) system's local campus to offer course work responsive to the day-to-day interests of the direct care paraprofessional staff of the New Castle State Hospital.

How much does the dearth of academically reputable material mean to the preparation of professionals? To those who offer the training? To the teachers? Do they serve the chil-



dren more or less effectively? Can a field achieve credibility when many of the people in it possess limited or uneven "book" credentials or in which the key intellectual content is often contained in mimeographed sheets listing technical competencies and the location of local social service agencies?

These, and others like them, are probably unfair questions. They nevertheless need to be asked of the decision-makers for a rapidly growing sector of the human services which demands heavy personal commitment. In return, it offers mainly psychic rather than material rewards for having undergone training, stresses teamwork on the job while constantly leaving the aide to perform alone in often exceptionally difficult circumstances, and customarily asks practitioners with limited incomes to underwrite much of the cost of the training. There are answers, mostly inconclusive and unsatisfactory. They highlight the fragility of the base of support of this incredibly important activity.

To most of the instructional aides who work with the children the form of their own in-service training is largely immaterial. They usually do not aspire to four-year degrees and certification as teachers, nurses, psychologists, or social workers. Many, it may be argued, already are in part all four, with or without formal training. But they do not want instruction that may tempt them to challenge or share the authority of their immediate supervisor. "Keep me in the classroom working with these kids and a good teacher," declared an aide from Austin, Texas. They are, on the whole, a thoroughly practical, task-directed cadre of people who sense that their line of work is part of a changing scene, and they want to know how to function most productively within it. If there are no decent, readable books, their world will probably not collapse. And, given the rising cost of materials and the reluctance of their employing agencies to pay for anything "extraneous" like books, they probably wouldn't have much access to $15-30 books in any case. Much more important to them is that they not miss out on anything new or useful.

The qualities that make the instructional aide so effective are predictably, exactly those that may deflect initiative on the part of potential textbook authors. Claiming few intellectual pretensions, the aide has become a one-on-one operative with the self-applied label of "people person." Although not skeptical of book learning she does not count it as vital to the job nor, to the extent that opportunities may arise, career advancement. The aide may be a closet intellectual, possibly but not customarily even a college degree-holder. But she or he can compartmentalize. Taste in literature or drama has little to do with the job of teaching movement to second-grade students with cerebral palsy or drilling a deaf pre-schooler in lip-reading or speaking. These are practical, "hard" skills. The paraprofessional wants to develop them further and isn't overly choosy about the mode of learning as long as it is effective and closely linked to workday problems. Reaching such a person with expensively packaged conceptual or ideological content may be beyond the capacity—or the professional desire—of many reputable educational textbook-writers.

The materials that were beginning to appear in 1979 and 1980 were, above all, oriented to the localities in which they were to be applied. They showed up in very limited numbers of copies not generally available to the field, even commercially. Usually short of analytical or factual content about the role of the aide, they tend to provide several common elements:

- a historical backdrop, including a legislation and/or administrative history;
- a task analysis;
- a detailed, annotated guide to the training process;
- listings of competencies a paraprofessional should master, generally not as a direct result of the training, but rather in its application in the school or other work setting;
- suggested instruments for evaluating the child's progress and assessing the aide's performance; and
- sundry sections targeted to special, locally applicable, circumstances of geography, handicapping, or supplementary agencies and facilities.

Rather than textbooks, such compilations are, in effect, aids for the aide. Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio, calls its excellent and attractive version, "A Handbook for Paraprofessional Training." No paraprofessional in or near Dayton, whether in Sinclair's highly successful training program or

not, should be without it, but both Dr. Bonnie Johnson, who directed its production and the resultant curriculum, and Dennis Moore, the training program's coordinator, are quick to note that it is far from inclusive. Sensibly, it is in loose-leaf rather than bound form.

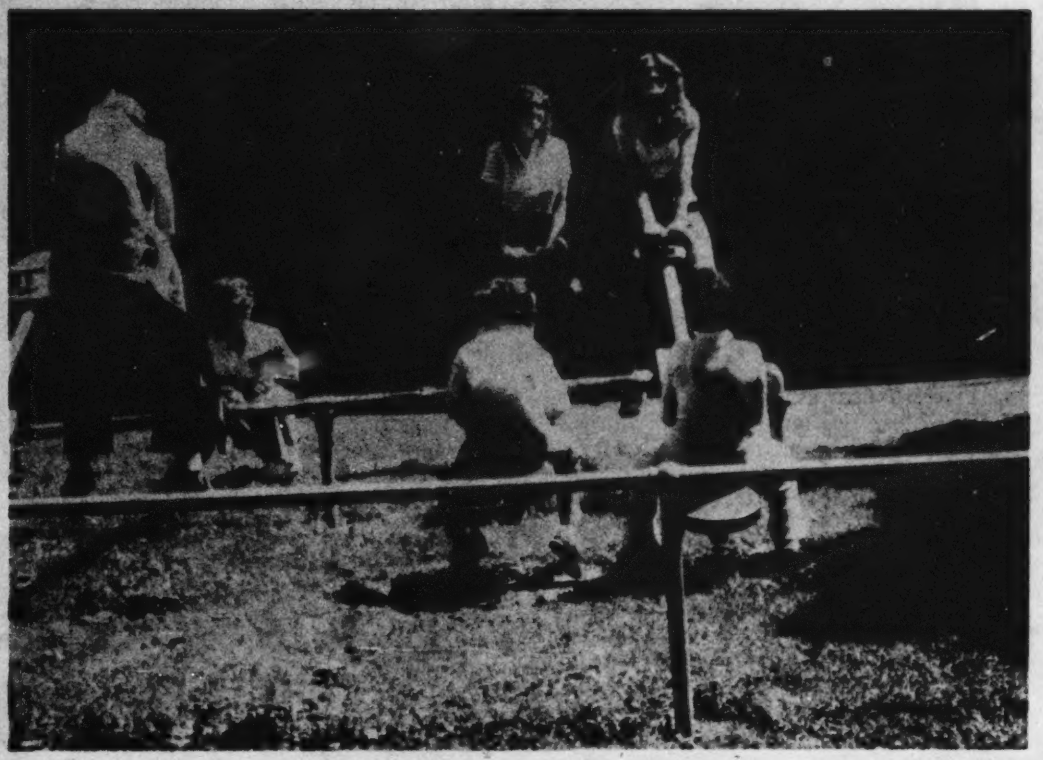
For the aides themselves, then, recourse to the products of scientific research is probably not imperative. These products have helped shape the careers of the teachers in whose classrooms they labor, and the teacher is, after all, the designer, manager, and principal executor of the main activities that guide the paraprofessional's work. It should be a reasonably safe assumption that current knowledge is abroad in the land—or at least within the walls of the space the teacher, aide, and child with a handicap inhabit most of the time.

The assumption is, of course, anything but safe, at least insofar as the teacher's understanding of the role of the instructional assistant is concerned. Often expert, current, and dedicated, the teacher of children with handicaps often underestimates the capacity of an aide, especially a trained one, to make the vital difference between getting through the day and making it sing. "It takes more out of me to get something out of her than it does to deal with five autistic children," declared a Newton (Massachusetts) teacher of her aide. A teacher of educable mentally retarded children in Phoenix (Arizona) complained: "Ever since she (the instructional aide) took those courses on developmental disabilities I find myself under siege in my own classroom. She's either an aide or she isn't. They're paying me, not her, to run this class."

The reactions are understandable. Whatever else they illustrate, they highlight the confusion in roles that training can foster. And they surely reveal circumstances that should not exist.

Part of the problem goes back to the narrowness of the intellectual or support base from which the training of paraprofessionals proceeds. It is not enough to train them to know more and do better in the exciting era that began with the enactment of Public Law 94-142 and the various demanding state laws. Policymakers, teachers, and parents have all been strongly indoctrinated in the implications and potential of this revolution. But some of the specifics are missing, notably one headed "training teachers to work with trained paraprofessionals." This pivotally important feature of the new life in special education is beyond the mandate of the community college, although an occasional two-degree-holding full-fledged teacher enrolls, for no credit and usually at personal expense, in courses there for "her" or "his" aide. The subject is absent from the curricula of colleges of education and teacher-directed teacher centers. Even in some of the nation's experimental or less conventional settings for training there is rarely more than casual mention of the need for involving teachers in the training of paraprofessionals. And yet, as the voluminous ASSIST materials of Indiana University's Developmental Training Center demonstrate, there is hardly a more crucial feature of staff development for those who deal with children with handicaps than the relationships between teacher, who is increasingly becoming an "instructional manager", and aide, who is assuming more and more instructional duties. Properly conceived and designed, this aspect of the vital link that paraprofessionals represent may make the difference between success and failure in the special education classroom.

# Should Teachers Do It All?



Two special education teachers in Indiana:

> I don't know what I'd do without my paraprofessional. She's someone who knows the children just as well as I. Someone I can share my successes and disappointments with, bounce ideas off of, help me evaluate what we're doing—just somebody to commiserate with.
>
> Every idea I come up with, my paraprofessional has a better idea. I can't do anything right. She criticizes everything I do. If I say up she says down. If I say left, she says right.

Richard White, 1979

These are by no means the only teachers'-eye views of the aide. Some, in the measured judgment of Indiana University's Developmental Training Center (DTC) at Bloomington, are ill-informed about what to expect of paraprofessionals, and few believe that they have had a real part in reducing the confusion. Many find widely differing levels of competence and commitment on the part of the aides. In some cases the teacher finds the paraprofessional to be a competitive rather than complementary force in the classroom, while in others the teacher believes, with ample justification, that the effort to plan the aide's day equals that of designing the children's. And yet the authors of all of these often well-grounded theories freely concede that the aide can be a vital force, one of the core elements, in fact, that can spell the difference between success and failure in a classroom with exceptional children.

Add to this litany still another crucial element—the solidly based fact that the teacher has had little to do with the training of the aide—and some of the principal themes of the Developmental Training Center's work become clear. These themes, really problems, in the words of the DTC, are:

- Confusion regarding the appropriate role responsibilities of paraprofessionals.
- Failure to build training programs for paraprofessionals based on actual classroom needs.
- Lack of systematic efforts to involve teachers in the actual training of paraprofessionals to make sure that the training is consistent with their practices.
- Failure to build training programs for paraprofessionals which do not interfere with the ongoing job demands of paraprofessionals and teachers.

These are both problems and precepts. They define a set of grievous shortcomings in the preparation of aides while providing a foundation upon which to build attitudes and programs. What has emerged from years of sustained inquiry at Indiana University is an almost wholly teacher-based approach which represents (1) the only serious, well-supported, university-based design for training paraprofessionals (called "instructional associates" in the material that has been developed); (2) a training pattern that, despite its origins in a university, all but ignores the role of the postsecondary institution, whether community or four-year college; and (3) some of the most comprehensive training aids available to the field. Unlike most training programs for paraprofessionals, which draw their documentary sustenance from literature prepared for other needs or which prepare materials "in flight" or a lesson ahead of the aide, the Indiana program is large, inclusive and attractively packaged.

As the developers of *ASSIST: Associate Instructional Support for Teachers* and Indiana's Director of Special Education, Gilbert Bliton surveyed the scene, it was clear to them that the preparation of aides in the wake of the new state and federal laws of the mid- and late 1970's was haphazard and unfocused. It could be a one-hour tour of the school or a welcoming speech by the principal. Or it might materialize as a set of workshops or lectures. Or both. Or none of the above. But if there was agreement on one facet of this "training", it was that it usually didn't connect to the aide's work day. However valuable were the discernments of a visiting expert or community leader, they had little to do with the classroom

and less to do with what went on in a teacher's fiefdom. What's more, these exposures often took the aides out of the instructional process or forced them into inconvenient and irregular afterschool activities at sites far removed from their schools.

Even in "good" systems which made an effort to obtain or provide training, the aide and the teachers received separate instruction that was seldom complementary and even collided, inevitably to the detriment of the aide, who lost most of the battles, and of the child. Receiving their "in-service" orientation separately, they returned to the classroom with new but sometimes incompatible skills, with predictable misunderstanding and unnecessary tensions. Moreover, the aides themselves spanned a wide range of educational backgrounds and experience, a circumstance that seldom deters trainers who simply don't have the time to individualize training. And given the attrition and turnover of paraprofessionals, even the most finite differentiation among the aides might have made little difference.

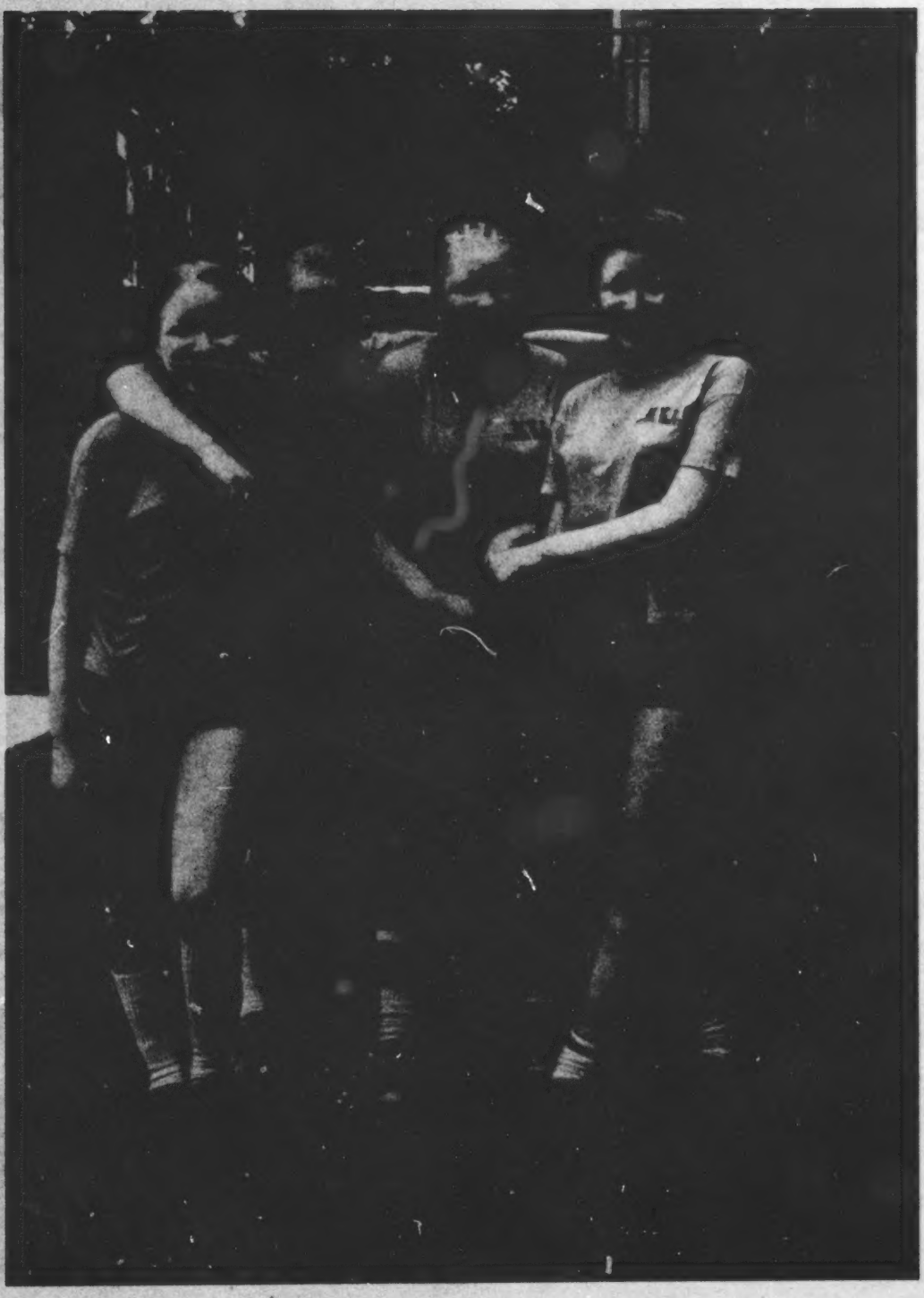
With the strong support of the state's educational agency and a financial boost from the U.S. Office of Education's Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, the DCT set about creating what ASSIST leader Richard White was called a "modifiable, flexible, ongoing in-service training program...decentralized and classroom-based...where scheduling was under the control of the professional classroom teacher...done during the working day whenever time permitted...under the teacher's control...modified to be consistent with the teacher's leadership style. In essence, we wanted a training program which would give the teacher the professional prerogative to use this human resource like any other resource." A less explicit objective was to train the teacher in the process, an especially difficult yet necessary objective in the case of teachers who were either inadequate trainers, poorly schooled themselves, or both.

Should an instructional associate meet minimal requirements, stop short of doing certain instructional jobs, or aspire to emulate the teacher? Or are none of these criteria for performance applicable to ASSIST-trained aides? To White and his colleagues in Bloomington, the answer was simple: The paraprofessional must meet a set of minimal criteria, and the rest is up to the "professionals," namely the teachers. Considering the aide to be a resource, albeit a human one, the developers of ASSIST said: "Milk it for all you can milk it. Maximize the use of the paraprofessional." Out of these strongly felt, almost ideological, bases came the ASSIST program—three sets of materials tailored for aides and teachers who work with (1) children with moderate, severe and profound handicaps; (2) those who are educable mentally retarded, learning disabled, and behaviorally disordered; and (3) preschool children with handicaps. Much of the content of the packages differs, but there are common elements: a *Teacher's Guide* for the supervising teacher, and a *Sourcebook* for the instructional associate. Although various films and cassettes have been or are being developed, these publications are the core of ASSIST. There is no program without them.

The creators of ASSIST make no bones about the paramountcy of the teacher, who receives the material before the aide and is told to "get comfortable with this thing, go through it, modify it, expand it, individualize it"—in fact, to act very much like the traditionally criticized teacher who stays a single lesson ahead of the class. Once the teacher is at home with the *Teacher Guide*, she or he gives the aide the *Sourcebook* (the two are almost identical) and the training begins. It is thoroughly individualized and in the terms agreed to by two presumably mature people. As schedules and administrators permit, the two-person instructional teams may come together with others.

The advantages of this personal, classroom-based approach are many. There is no need for complex schedules and administrative arrangements. It is self-pacing. With modification, it can be repeated for new waves of aides. The system's authors can rest assured that all who use it will have achieved certain minimal standards and possess a body of common knowledge. In normal circumstances, it should create better teacher-aide communication. It has immediate applicability with the children in the class.

The originators of ASSIST do not, of course, claim infallibility for it. They recognize the urge that many communities, two-year colleges, and aides feel to provide and receive a many-sided, well-rounded curriculum. They continue to work on theirs and on the films and filmstrips that accompany it.



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# Where Training Happens

If foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds, as Emerson said, then those who offer training for special education paraprofessionals are intellectual behemoths—at least as far as the variety of training sites is concerned. Paraprofessionals learn in their own classrooms and elsewhere in their schools. They train at state hospitals and other public institutions. They take courses in medical schools. They learn singly and in small clusters at work sites different and distant from their own. They work in the halls of the nation's great universities. They convene to learn in the conference rooms of hotels. They receive their training, in short, wherever there is someone to instruct and a place in which to learn.

## Community Colleges: The Natural Habitat

The training of aides is a natural responsibility of community colleges, a generality that is inapplicable in the few states where they have not yet arrived in force as the people's college. The two-year college meets most of the field's main criteria:

- It is community-based and presumably sensitive to the problems and needs of its "jurisdiction"—an often violated truism that is nevertheless usually valid.
- It is theoretically age-blind. As a *community* enterprise, it commits itself to lifelong learning for all adults. This is one of its principal attractions.
- It is most comfortable when it can create, tailor, and deliver instruction to students who want technical, non-theoretical knowledge.
- It is not wedded to recondite textbooks, nor is it inclined to await thoroughly validated research before providing instruction.
- It usually has sufficient administrative flexibility to be able to add a specialty when the demand exists. Its style borders on the entrepreneurial; it is willing to take a chance.
- It does not insist, as a general rule, that its faculty publish or perish, hold doctorates, or otherwise adhere to academic protocol. Weakly credentialed but experience-tested practitioners can usually hold adjunct or part-time faculty posts.
- It has no objection—indeed, it is strongly attracted—to conducting classes far, far off campus, especially in clinical, "practicum" or laboratory-type sites.
- It is unarguably the best bargain in post-secondary education. The cost of a full-time year-long program at a typical community college may be as little as one-third of that of a year at the nearest campus of the state university and often one-fifth the expense of instruction at a private college. Sometimes, as in California, it is just plain free, like public school.

Nevertheless, the community college shoe does not always fit the paraprofessional's foot. Training special education aides requires more than a faculty versed in the skills a successful instructional aide must have. Most of the paraprofessionals thought they had finished school, a status many welcomed, when they received their high school diplomas (or, in some instances, college degrees) ten, twenty, thirty, or even forty years earlier. They saw no reason to return. No one had complained about how they were doing their job. Besides, credits from a community college, or from any higher education institution, did not guarantee more pay or status. And they cost money even when someone else covered part of the fees. An aide in Connecticut:

> I'm just as happy I'm not in some college program. My only career ambition at the age of 38 is to do the best job I can to help these kids. Let the teacher keep taking courses. She gets better jobs and more money for doing it. I don't. Sure I want to keep up with things. Most of these teachers are good people, though, and mine at least tries to fill me in on any new stuff she picks up. Of course, I'd feel left out if I couldn't get to a demonstration or a workshop every so often. Don't misquote me. I'll always need training, and I want it whenever I can get some. Believe me, though, I don't need the hassle of tests or writing papers. I guess what I'm saying is I'll do anything I can to do better by these kids. But I don't see why I have to go listen to some professor tell me how to do my job. There must be better ways.

A different view of training at the level of the two-year college emerged from a younger woman enrolled in the program at Ellsworth Community College in Iowa Falls, Iowa:

> When I left high school in 1971, I did a lot of things like factory work, but I've always liked working with kids with problems. So I came here to take the one-year course that leads to a certificate. I wasn't much interested in more school, though. I really wanted to get to work. When I left I got a job teaching personal skills to handicapped kids living with foster families. It was OK for a while, but it wasn't really a challenge. I came back here to take a real academic program and try to get an associate's degree so I'd have something solid that would help me get a better job in this kind of work. It's kind of weird, though. After two years in the job I had before I returned to Ellsworth last fall, I was making much less than I do now in my part-time job cleaning out offices every night. I'm not sure now just what I do want to do. The courses here are good. Maybe I'll go on to a four-year program and try to be a teacher. Or maybe I'll stay in this field. I wish it paid better and had some security.

A recent high school graduate in the District of Columbia talks about enrolling as a full-time student in a two-year course for aides in the human services:

> Yes, I want to work with these problem kids. The worse the problem, the more I want to be with them to help. What I don't need now, though, is to go right back to school for more courses. Why not see right away if I have what it takes to do this work? If I find a job in a day care center or some school, I can work my way in and find out where I fall short. They say the pay is about the same, whether I go to school for two more years or start right in. If I do well, and the school people think I could use some training, maybe they'll pay for it too. That way I'll be learning on the job, getting lined up for any promotions they may have, and still be getting the courses I may need, even some kind of degree.

The views of these three women hardly constitute a scientifically based sampling of attitudes toward community colleges and their capabilities in the field. Implicitly, all three and many others appear to respect the two-year institution's resources and commitments, an assumption that does not always hold up to fluoroscopic scrutiny, while not considering this avenue as the *only*, or even the best, possibility for *their* development.

## On Tobacco Road

In High Point, North Carolina, a city of 40,000 best known to the outside world as the site of the annual Furniture Mart, 18 paraprofessionals work with the 1,000 children with handicaps who attend the city's public schools. The aides average slightly over 30 years of age and have completed high school plus occasional courses adding up to a 13th year. With one or two exceptions, notably one veteran of 25 years on the job, they do not have much longevity in their posts. They are permanent employees, with an average salary near the lower reaches of the scale for custodial and food service employees, whose advancement is not tied to improvement through in-service training.

But they wanted training because, say Ann Short and Laverne Hendricks of the school system's special education unit, the children weren't receiving the service they were entitled to get. Trainable children were too docile, and the aides seemed unable to break out of a rut of predominantly menial housekeeping, errand-running, and behavior-monitoring into which they had settled. Teachers were, often unwillingly, totally dominating classroom activity, while the potentially strong paraprofessional resource was underused. Too, new programs, especially for younger children with emotional handicaps, would suffer without the most effective deployment of trained aides.

The case was hardly unique; it may come close to the national average—statistically, educationally, and administratively. Although the several nearby colleges involve themselves in High Point's community life, none had directly assessed or approached this particular need, and their strengths may not lie in these areas. Where, then, to get the kinds of across-the-board orientation that 14 of the 18 volunteered to take?

The best avenue, it developed, was the "Training Project for Paraprofessionals in Education for the Handicapped (TTPEH)" of the Center for Action-Based Leadership Experiences, an affiliate of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, a largely Black institution. Previously berthed in a state-run agency, the Learning Institute of North Carolina in Durham, the Training Project is a low-cost, federally funded, multi-purpose operation geared to defining and assessing competencies, and designing and running training programs for special education aides, more precisely those working with two- to eight-year-old children with moderate or severe handicaps. The project's purposes are intertwined. The competencies are tested in the proving grounds of the various child care centers and schools in which the project provides its services.

High Point was a natural for TPPEH and its energetic director, Bernice Willis, holder of a Duke University doctorate. What the High Point aides needed, and the system could absorb, was a flexible, part-time, problem-focused series of workshops. These would be comprehensive but non-repetitive. They would complement the teachers rather than threaten them. And they would provide a core of common knowledge. Every other week from November 1978 to May 1979 the aides and, at various time, five of the teachers, came to the main headquarters of the school district where, at no cost to them, they covered the substantitive waterfront in concentrated 90-minute sessions with Willis at the helm. The three in-service training days allowed during the period also fell into the TPPEH process.

Often strapped by the paucity of *usable* materials and texts, Willis scouted the terrain through frequent visits to the aides and teachers in their classrooms. She came to know the children with whom they were working. Finally, she simply developed her own materials. A "third party" evaluator found improvement, sometimes significant, in the aides' competencies as a result of the four-"module" sequence—orientation, human growth and development, speech and language, and behavior management.

Less susceptible to scientific quantification, the aides found themselves sharing experiences and tips across the once-formidable barriers of school jurisdiction. Once hooked on training and with 90 percent judging their program very good or excellent, they still wanted more, much more, in specific areas. Even after the exposure they received, they voiced strong needs for additional work. They wanted to learn more about behavior management. The conditions of physical handicapping were still not fully clear to them. They needed training in how to work more effectively with small children with severe and profound handicaps.

And they found the general subject of parental involvement to require amplification.

Flexibility and the ability to respond to unexpected overlooked demands of many kinds appear to be the hallmarks of the TPPEH enterprise. While nominally based at North Carolina A and T, the project had yet to offer a course there by 1980. Its style was that of a fast-moving trouble-shooter ready, in Willis's words, "to help out, get things started, and move along." The TPPEH mark has covered much of North Carolina. It has offered courses at the two-year Guildford Technical Institute. In the summer of 1979, it presented weekly sessions at the Cerebral Palsy and Orthopedic School at Greensboro for a group of aides whose median age of 47.1 years and average 11th grade education posed special conditions. The staffs of several Head Start programs have received TPPEH's brand as have the professionals connected to such diverse establishments as Sandhills Community College and the Marion County Community Action Agency.

Adaptable though it has proved to be, TPPEH could epitomize a well-regarded but rootless process were it not for the "intangibles" that it is fostering in North Carolina, a state whose Governor has actually encouraged the placement of education aides. In the Greensboro area, where it has had its greatest visibility, there are two well-known special schools, several college and university establishments, and three strong school systems—those of High Point, Greensboro, and Guilford County. All have come to regard TPPEH as necessary and worthwhile, both for the direct services it provides and for its readiness to transfer its knowledge to other trainers on the scene, and through the four sets of materials it uses and continues to develop.

For all of its formidable geography, North Carolina is a friendly "down home" state in which large bureaucratic systems do not barricade professionals from each other. The TPPEH effort does not function in isolation. Although largely funded through the federal government, it is close to the state's Department of Public Instruction and the responsible state official for programs for children who are educable and trainable mentally handicapped. Thoroughly conversant with TPPEH, the state draws upon its resources and wisdom for its own training programs, especially summer staff development workshops for aides. The state has some funds for training paraprofessionals, and it guarantees part of their salaries, although much of its work is centered on assuring that all special education teachers are certified by 1981. Unsurprisingly, a 1978 task force did not recommend to the state Board of Education that aides receive any special attention regarding training for certification. These issues remain in limbo, and whatever prospect TPPEH may have for exerting state-wide influence thus must hinge on forces less tangible than laws, regulations or even stated priorities.

The North Carolina paradox, like that of most states where special education aides are concerned, goes further. The same task force that in effect rejected certification (which however, may not always be a good idea; definitions and contexts are inconsistent) also ranked the "skills important in the training of a paraprofessional." They cannot be very different from those of a teacher of children with handicaps, as this list attests:

- Skills in understanding the characteristics of special education students,
- Skills related to working with children,
- Interpersonal relations skills,
- Disciplinary skills,
- Skills in working with children with specific handicaps,
- Subject matter skills,
- Organizational skills, and
- Skills in operation of office and audiovisual equipment.

Nowhere in this listing of the considered views and priorities of directors of special education, superintendents, supervisors of paraprofessionals, and the paraprofessionals themselves, is there any reference to the menial competencies that still spring to most American minds when the school aide is mentioned. The same survey was equally revealing in its findings on the educational importance and commonness of occurrence of the duties that can be performed by paraprofessionals. The top three on both lists, and in exactly the same order of importance from the top, were: educating individual children (one-to-one basis), assisting with group educational activities, and preparation of classroom materials. What else is there?

## In Middletown, USA

We're talking about education, not medical treatment.

I thought the idea was to get those people out of the hospitals and into our places, the schools. What can they possibly teach us?

Our aides are neighborhood folks helping out in the schools. They aren't medical specialists, and they don't want to be.

Random comments by school principals and teachers, 1980

These aren't the mutterings of educators with narrow minds. They are the spot reactions of a group of responsible principals and teachers to an observation that they just might learn something useful from the local mental hospital about training teaching assistants who work with disabled children. What possible similarities could there be, they asked, between life in a permanently controlled, dead-end institutional atmosphere and that of an elementary school of largely well-adjusted children in a well-to-do suburb?

They are asking the wrong questions for the wrong reasons. The right ones, far too rarely posed, are: "What can we learn from people in fields similar, often even related at their core, to ours?" Or "How can we avoid repeating mistakes someone else has already made, and, perhaps, save some public money in the bargain?" Or, even more revolutionary: "Is there any way we can combine our talents and resources so that everyone we're trying to serve gets better service?"

There is little need here for a polemic on the traditional, perhaps even arrogant, unwillingness of education to enrich itself with the experience of other fields in the social and human services. Probably more than most, special educators do tend to cross over—because of obvious shared professional concerns and because their "clients" often receive services from several sources or sectors. But even others often fail to see the forest for the trees.

A typical and in no way harmful blurring of the distinctions educators are prone to make occurs in Indiana. There, New Castle State Hospital which calls itself a "developmental center" but is, more precisely put, a residential intermediate care facility for persons who are mentally retarded, has created a

training program with potentially broad repercussions. A 440-resident institution which once housed 1,200 and still numbers 300 direct care staff members, New Castle's population features young adults and has 90-100 persons of school age. With the future of its Chrysler parts-making plant, by far the largest industry in town, far from secure, the city of New Castle harbors doubts about its future. Non-professional jobs at the state hospital may not be the vocational dream of everyone in the 22,000-person community, but they paid reasonably well in late 1979, and the surroundings weren't so bad compared to those in the factories downtown. All in all, not a bad place, with pretty good opportunities for the predominantly (85 percent) female direct care work force. But this force desperately needed across-the-board improvement. Its performance, by its own standards, was not good enough.

One of New Castle's goals is "to become a training center for individuals working in related developmental disability areas," who would in time become a pool of trained specialists to be shared along with other resources, "with other service providers and educational institutions." The goal is ambitious but realistic. When Shirley Miller Higgins, the hospital's Director of Staff Development, solicited the views of the main body of hands-on staff, (the psychiatric attendants, who have long since become "developmental skill technicians (DST)") about training, she learned that 93.5 percent wanted more and that 94.8 percent said they would participate.

Higgins's motives stemmed from several sources. She and the hospital's administration wanted direct contact staff to think more in educational developmental than in medical or custodial terms. They were too strongly, but understandably, oriented toward nursing rather than special education. Their field did not have the educational credibility that course credits would help it to achieve. A systematic procession through a well-conceived set of progressively sophisticated courses would strengthen New Castle State Hospital's and the state's efforts to create a DST career ladder that meant something. Too, the so-called Basic 5 training that the DST's had received shortly after joining the NCSH staff—a full-time five-week orientation to the law and the facts of life at NCSH—was in truth informational and compulsory rather than developmental and optional. And even the more advanced training in pharmacology and medical technology that the technicians received after achieving permanent employment status still did not get at a broad improvement of services. The hospital's mandate had become more extensive, and better performance, especially in an era of deinstitutionalization, had become imperative.

Armed with these factors as constants—the DST's' near-unanimous desire for college-level work and the support of senior hospital staff—Higgins began to pick her way through the bureaucratic spider web. In 1976 she tried to sell Ball State University in nearby Muncie on a two-year degree for the DST's which would give credit for their courses at New Castle and their experience in life and work. Ball State was enthusiastic at first hearing but, said Higgins, "didn't call back right away" although they came on board in 1980. For nearly three years she developed course prospectuses, made the necessary organizational presentations and, in April, 1979, she concluded her "deal." With the approval of the state's Department of Mental Health, its Commission for Higher Education, and, among others, the State Board of Vocational-Technical Education, the New Castle program was formally launched in September at Indiana Vocational Technical College (Ivy Tech) Region 6 in Muncie. Higgins depicts the experience as a 13-step process culminating in the Ivy Tech courses and, eventually, degrees.

A word about Ivy, which is not to be confused with the east's Ivy League. The Muncie campus is one of 13 in the state's 17-year-old system of two-year institutions whose sole purpose is "to provide job-oriented training." It has no academic pretensions nor does it prepare students for transfer to four-year colleges. Its commitment is to provide "practical technical training generally not available at the traditional college." The Muncie campus usually has around 1,600 students, who average 29 years of age, in full or part-time attendance. Its graduates have few problems finding jobs around Muncie and even in economically unpredictable New Castle. Its unadorned purpose of serving the region's needs—in business, industrial production and service and in the "health occupations"—had long since caught the fancy of civic leaders and potential

students alike. With its direct vocational emphasis, the new program in what Ivy decided to call "mental health rehabilitation technology (MHRT)" was a natural for Muncie. Even before it began in the fall of 1979, interest in the new program had triggered a decision to offer similar off-campus courses at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Marion, Indiana.

The MHRT program blends several of the key qualities of a model program:

- It gives credit for experience at work—in the case of the employees at New Castle, some 32 of the 91 quarter hours that lead to an associate degree. In other words, the Basic 5 plus the more specialized work in pharmacology and technology.
- Much of the instruction is at the work site.
- Ivy Tech does not demand a high school diploma or equivalent for aspiring students, or for those who may receive a one-year vocational certificate (45 credit hours). It does insist on this qualification, however, for those desiring the degree it offers—the two-year Associate in Applied Sciences.
- Fees are minimal. A series of excellent administrative arrangements between New Castle and Ivy could almost eliminate costs for many DST's.
- There is a solid consumer base. Higgins's and Ivy's surveys covering the seven-county Region 6 revealed at least 500 potential students working in residential facilities and an additional 500 special education aides, nursing home staff, day care center, and Head Start program workers, and others who would be logical participants.
- Ivy Tech has the flexibility a four-year college often lacks. It can offer advanced standing and credits, a practice it has followed, for example, in the cases of individual students in electronics. It does not force an adult worker to repeat in a classroom what he or she has been doing successfully at work.
- Despite the symbiotic Ivy-NCSH connection, the program is by no means exclusive. It is open to anyone desiring to enroll, and it may well confer added respectability on the fields it serves.
- Although originating in one state facility, the MHSR effort could have state-wide influence. Ivy and the Indiana Commission of Higher Education consider it to be a model or pilot program which may, in time, find its way into the curricula of eight of its 13 sites.

It is easy to inflate the potential of a program like the MHSR endeavor. The stakes nonetheless are high, and whatever its ultimate path, it does offer a glimpse at an unconventional, yet remarkably attractive and realistic approach. It is responsive to known needs. Its participants want the service. It is inexpensive. It creates an easy yet productive partnership between service-supplying organization and consumer. Its content is work-focused without being narrowly specialized. If it works as well as it should, the yield will be worth any cost in bureaucratic sweat, academic planning, and logistical arrangement. that yield, of course, will be the consumer—whether resident of "developmental center," mentally retarded preschool child, or public school student who is severely handicapped—who will receive better training and may enjoy a more productive life.

## Maria Gonzales Goes to School

The Special Education Law of 1970, Texas Senate Bill 231, stipulates that the "state superintendent will establish standards for the certification of paraprofessionals in special education." The superintendent has doubtless had other, more pressing things on his mind, for, a decade later, "certification" in the Lone Star state appeared to consist of satisfactory evidence of completion of high school or an acceptable substitute. Yet, if the example of San Antonio is typical of the state, paraprofessionals in Texas are both better and better trained than this apparent laxity would suggest. Among the principal reasons: the energetic and sensitive efforts of the members of the faculty of San Antonio College (SAC) who constitute the professional staff of "Paraprofessional Assistance in Special Education (PASE)," a federally funded effort to meet special, long unmet needs. The entire annual

cost of this project to the United States Government is roughly equivalent to the salary, without fringe benefits, of one middle-ranking professional staff member of the U.S. Department of Education.

Like most urban community colleges, San Antonio College gears its offerings and outlook to the mature, commuting, job-oriented student body it serves. With a staggering total of 32,848 learners in attendance in the 1978-79 school year (plus 11,110 more the previous summer), its facilities must be utilitarian and well located, and its programs consonant with its second year, PASE is off and flying.

From its beginnings, the PASE approach has been, in the words of William Shinder, its chief operative, to "know who the aides are and to take them from where they are to where they ought to be" and not "to fill them with educational jargon and esoteric concepts." The first fact of life in PASE's world is thus to know who the aides are. In multi-ethnic San Antonio, according to Culbertson, Shinder and SAC faculty member Marion Sokol, the "typical" aide (a near-contradiction in terms) is likely to be a 35-year old Hispanic-Amer-

the city's economy and social needs. They are, none more so than PASE, although their supporters might agree that the college's renowned Mortuary Science and Dental Assisting Programs also strike at certain centers of community concern.

The PASE endeavor blends imaginative leadership, growing need, and hard digging. Originating in the college's child development program whose chairperson, Elizabeth Culbertson, created and nominally heads it, PASE is ambitious. It aims at nothing less than providing training for all or most of the special education aides in 17 nearby school districts, Head Start and Title XX centers, day care establishments, community agencies, private schools, and others in or rimming the city. With 90 already affiliated with the one-year program and a 30-person waiting list in

ican mother—call her Maria Gonzales—of four children who has been an aide for three years. Ms. Gonzalez's husband probably has a salaried nonprofessional job, and her financial contribution is useful, if not necessary. She is the first woman in her family to hold a full-time job, even though she tends to think of it as an extension of her own home. Bilingual, although probably not strong in reading Spanish, she is a high school graduate who likes her work and knows she does well at it—much better, she is sometimes convinced, than some of the "Anglo" teachers in the building.

Maria's strengths are many, but they may tend to collide with some of the principles of PASE or similar programs. The culture in which she was raised views disability in a more open, accepting fashion than does the larger

"Anglo" world. The community and family pitch in to help those with handicaps. Many moderately retarded Mexican-American children stay in the hospitable barrio rather than go to schools where "professional" care is available. Maria's emphasis is more protective and care-giving than educational. To the displeasure of the presiding teacher, she seems to handle the children as if they were her own.

Yet Maria is no know-it-all. Although she often appears bemused by the "Anglo" professionals in the field, she hears them out and resists the temptation to correct what she considers to be the occasional bits of false information they get from books instead of the classroom. She knows that they are discovering new things about working with children with handicaps, things she would like to know if they can be applied in her classroom. So she concedes, often reluctantly, that she may, after all, need an occasional workshop, even a course or two. Her husband doesn't much like the idea, and courses don't lead to pay hikes. But she'll do what has to be done even if she has to shell out hard-earned dollars with no guarantees of full reimbursement.

The San Antonio College people spent 18 months learning and analyzing these attitudes before designing a set of carefully phased responses to them. Moving into a gaping void—only one of the 17 school districts had done any independent training of special education aides—the college stressed practical applications at the expense of an excuse of survey-type courses. An advisory board of employers—teachers, agencies supervisors, and special agency directors—counseled Culbertson and Shinder on what was happening in their precincts. They told them what kinds of shortcomings needed work and about the social forces and stresses that most directly affected the aides. Perhaps to allay the aides' misgivings, and because it was good political business the college located PASE in its vocational-technical rather than academic track. To assure the participants a modicum of identity and stability, and because it reflected the most deeply-held convictions of PASE's authors, half of the year-long curriculum, or six of its 12 credits, was to consist of "practicum" training. This is a euphemism for field-or site-based work which, in its turn, is another way of saying that the aides would receive "technical assistance" and be assessed in their jobs. This feature effectively dictated that PASE would really be an in-service program, although a handful of non-employed aspirants has also participated.

The content of the courses in the PASE sequence is unremarkable. It is a well-tested combination of material on handicapping conditions, the law and community relations, the psychology of exceptional children, and similar relevant offerings. What is remarkable about PASE is its singular style, its unique method of humanizing material that, in other hands and voices, has often proved to be formal, pedantic, and dull. A few examples:

- Despite their high professional credibility, most textbooks in special education and related subjects are written for college-educated professionals—therapists, specialists, psychologists, master teachers—and not for teacher aides. The PASE staff, especially Shinder, is "translating" them, without losing content, for less-qualified readers who appreciate reduced terms, shorter sentences, and elimination of redundancy.
- PASE emphasizes audio, slide and video tapes and is engaged in a ceaseless search to find suitable ones to use for a basically non-literary student body. In the process, the aides become technologically literate, to the extent that several have taught educable mentally retarded children how to use computer terminals with little supervision. In addition each paraprofessional is video-taped twice a semester as part of the PASE practicum. The tape is reviewed on a one-to-one basis by PASE staff and the aide.
- All participants in PASE receive their own Individualized Education Program (IEP) for one semester. They learn through the experience exactly how the system works, and then become an added resource to the teacher in this vital new phase of education for children with handicaps. The IEP for the aides is a product of observation in the classroom by a member of the PASE professional staff.
- The program develops its own materials with contributions by the students. To do this, everyone in it must

accept the premises that all children are active learners, that the new materials should be oriented to solving problems, and that the classrooms in which the paraprofessionals work are, in reality, resource rooms.

- Unlike many other government-funded educational projects, PASE will not disappear when the federal spigot turns off. San Antonio College is already footing the bill for important faculty costs and equipment, and the project is headed, eventually, for institutionalization and self-sufficiency.

## Training for Normalization

From her space at the wide end of a corridor which passes for an office at the Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Institute of the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, Karen Faison has a clear, informed perspective on Nebraska's world of disability. To her uncluttered view, she brings several unshakable values about how people should be equipped to deal with it. The result is a kind of fundamental credo that might just have universal applicability. It goes about like this:

- Normalization must be the objective of all care and of the training that therapists, technicians, aides and others engaged in the human services undergo to equip them to work with people with handicaps. Training must therefore take place at or be directly linked to the place where the individual with the disability, whether resident, patient, or student, will be learning.
- It is futile and misleading to be shackled by terminology, lables and definitions. Each person is an individual with individual needs. This applies to both the person with the handicap and the worker dealing with him/her, whether that worker is called a classroom aide, direct service provider, or human service technician.
- Anyone trained to deal with persons with severe and profound handicaps is likely to be able to work creditably with individuals with milder disabili-

ties. Training staff to work with persons with multiple handicaps is therefore the highest priority of Faison's programs.

- Fixed notions or static knowledge about specific disabilities are themselves handicaps—to student, aide, teacher, therapist—in an era of expanding knowledge and greatly altered perceptions.
- For some years to come, any self-respecting training program will probably have to develop its own materials because most of what exists is unequally relevant to real life settings. It is, moreover, excessively oriented to schools even though special and residential centers account for more of the population with handicaps than do the schools.
- Finally, it is possible to use grant funds creatively yet fully legally. Even though most barriers between the human services remain artificially high and grant moneys are finite and directed, temporary combinations can reinforce all participants while observing both spirit and letter of individual projects. It takes knowledge and imagination.

The universe of paraprofessional trainers is no bastion of consistency. Its practitioners come in all shapes, sizes, organizational forms, and ideological persuasions. Some, like Faison, cut across several of each. Reinforced by her credo and with a formidable professional reputation preceding her, she has created training programs out of bits, snippets, and needs that the deliverers of human services often did not know they had. The result is a complex of activities, nominally based at the prestigious Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Institute; which takes the Omaha training enterprise across the border into Iowa and back again to Nebraska's westernmost reaches. And yet in 1980 it was still held together by one person's tenacity and by what appeared to be an amalgam of scotch tape, baling wire, and used chewing gum.

The centerpiece of Faison's work at Meyer since 1976 has been the training of what Nebraska's officialdom calls human service technicians. Variously titled Director of that program as well as of Project XX Curriculum Development, and Coordinator of MCRI's Community College Program, Faison has managed to supervise programs at three two-year colleges—Metropolitan Technical, McCook, and Iowa Western Community Colleges—while overseeing a major effort to develop materials, propagandizing for the field as a whole, advising the eastern Nebraska Community Office of Retardation (ENCOR) on its training programs for residential mental retardation workers, and lecturing regularly to potential or current paraprofesionals. In the latter capacity she has taught three students at North Platte and Imperial, and six at McCook. The logistics of this travel are indescribable, yet she had designs on at least two additional sites—Central Tech in Hastings and Northwest Community College in Norfolk—and will undoubtedly launch programs at them and elsewhere. Wherever her professional travels lead her, she uses what's there. The "generic" agencies receive her support. New forms come into being only when local forces create them.

Back at MCRI, staff members Kathleen Davey and Billie Cook are producing and testing home-grown curricular materials for use by technicians working with persons of all ages who are mentally retarded. Traditionally, says Davey, their training has consisted of occasional workshops whose main characteristic has been a dearth of films or "software" of any perceptible quality. What has existed has been heavily freighted with technical jargon unsuitable for the hands-on paraprofessional who needs and wants clear, valid, useful instruction. Thus an emphasis on what the "field" said it needed for people at local centers where former residents or patients being "deinstitutionalized" from state facilities would spend much of their time.

The Davey-Cook method is both rigorous and ambitious. It encompasses all aspects of the curriculum-building process from surveying available materials through testing, correcting, and installing their system. While striving to develop new materials for geographically close technician-aides, Faison and her staff believe that their system could have state- and nation-wide applicability. They are convinced, too, that the materials today's paraprofessionals are using are, with a few significant exceptions, unsuitable, a point of view they defend with vigor and examples.

Typically, the Nebraskans have addressed the most difficult parts of the training process. Their first segment (or "module") is on the positioning and handling of persons with multiple handicaps, the next two on such unglamorous subjects as turning, transferring, and medication, and the fourth concerns what its authors call "critical analysis skills"—jargon for trying to teach the aides and others to recognize violations of human and legal rights, or, for another example, alerting them to spot cases in which "normalization" is being ignored. It took eight months to get the first "module" to the marketplace (not literally; this is a federally funded effort), but it, like the others, was designed in response to the explicit request of health care workers in the communities to which people with disabilities, whatever their ages, were returning. Production was a laborious eight-step affair which started with an examination of available literature. It progressed to the identification of valid experts and their knowledge and thence directly to a thorough assessment of what a line staff person needed to know and do in his or her job. These steps led to the preparation of precise performance objectives and a detailed analysis of each one of them. Once written up, the developing materials were bounced against substantive experts who explored and re-explored them and their more obvious alternatives and the materials were regrouped into operational lessons, both as texts and video tapes. As testing proceeded under "combat conditions", Davey, Cook and Faison made additional revisions. The result is an evolving body of current, fundamental materials for use in direct contact with persons of all ages who are severely, profoundly, and multiply handicapped.

Despite these unexceptional activities, conditions surrounding the training and use of aides, technicians, or technicians in Nebraska are less than ideal. At ENCOR, for example, there are usually 70 openings in a normal complement of 300-350 "technicians" who work in residential or institutional facilities. The budget for training was virtually eliminated, according to Sandy Ross, its director of staff development, in a state-wide rash of budget-slashing in the mid-1970's which decimated staff, training and, inevitably, shifted the expectations of many of those whose departure from state institutions was imminent as the era of deinstitutionalization began. The paradox, of course, was that the cuts inevitably affected newer employees, often those in whom the virtues of normalization were most solidly ingrained, and, as inevitably happens, the funds to train them and those who would have to work with long-term residents or the homeward-bound in new ways. Politics is not always sordid, but it surely appears so when it victimizes those who are handicapped. Of course, now that many of them will be voting. . . .

## Failure Breeds Success

Gene and Deborah Lund of Idaho Falls, Idaho, share a strong conviction. They are certain that children with disabling conditions—whether students in public schools, residents of "in-patient" establishments, or participants in special care centers—are not getting a fair shake from the authorities and institutions responsible for training them. Fortified by several years of close observational research and by support from the state's Department of Education, the Lunds, a school psychologist and a master teacher, believe they should do something about it. The result: a set of comprehensive materials, a series of regional workshops around the state for trainers of aides, and an off-beat, "Idaho first" approach to some of the thornier problems besetting exceptional children and aides in their state.

The Lund's regimen is the product of a complex of unevenly weighted forces and antecedents. One factor, often an unlikely or, at least, invisible one, is the unconventional role of the state of Idaho at two levels: the unique absence of a state system of community colleges, which elsewhere are often a dominating force in this field, and the staggering obstacles of geography. With a widely dispersed population of only 830,000 persons and a small but well-entrenched system of four-year colleges to meet its post-secondary educational needs, Idaho has felt no compulsion to provide what would probably be an underused network of community colleges. The two or three publicly supported ones are largely technical and vocational, while the largest two-year institution in the state is a sectarian (Church of the Latter Day Saints) establish-

ment that has not been involved in training special education aides. The issue of heavy duty training for most of Idaho's paraprofessionals at any college or university is moot in any case. Logistics are overwhelming. The potential student population is small, with a total of only 642 special education paraprofessionals in all of Idaho's public schools in early 1980. And Idaho has a tradition of stressing local solutions for local problems.

The focus on local action understandably finds support in the State Department of Education. As is so often the case, a state whose geographical isolation would seem to immunize it from the mainstream of public policy has, to the contrary or, pehaps, because of its isolation, demonstrated a capacity for innovation. Idaho is already ahead of some of the nation's wealthiest and reputedly most progressive states in educating children with handicaps. It has legislative commitment, supporting leadership, and well organized financial resources. Its mandatory special education law dates back to 1972, and the funding authority came two years later. From these beginnings paraprofessionals have always had a specified place in what the Idaho system calls its "ancillary funding law" alongside teachers, director, supervisors, consulting (or master) teachers, school-based psychologists and social workers, and teachers of gifted and talented children. With additional resources from the federal government, which in the 1979-80 school year was providing eight percent of all of the state's support for special education, the framework for effective policy was in place. And behind these already impressive factors was another: the helpful quirk in Idaho's cycle of appropriations that creates a "state foundation" program for funding education. English translation: Special education does not have to battle fashionable or faddish competitors for funding. It is part of an agreed annual formula. To have such predictability is an almost unheard-of luxury in American public education

The facts surrounding the training and deployment of Idaho's special education aides are unambiguous. The school population is 210,000; 16,000 of them are judged to require special attention; and there are 800-850 special education teachers who depend, in varying degrees, on the 642 aides. The state's "Professional Standards Commission" will eventually get to paraprofessionals, but whatever criteria it adopts wil probably have little bearing on the current corps of largely married, mostly middle-aged or slightly younger women whose husbands are usually successful business people. Some of the aides already have college degrees, and most who don't aren't interested in receiving them. The roster of aides is sprinkled with people like Joy Summers of Longfellow School in a pleasant Idaho Falls neighborhood

who had 14 years as a fully certified teacher but who finds working as an aide with exceptional, mostly reading disabled, children to be "rewarding and responsible." Elsewhere in Idaho, though, notably in districts with few children with handicaps, the aides found themselves spending most of their working day with the "tough" more difficult to handle children—the ones with truly debilitating disabilities or multiple handicaps—while the teacher centered her energies on those with milder problems or more amenable styles of learning.

The backdrop is important because it looms so large in the Lunds' work. Even with strong professional and financial support from the state, where Fred Russell and Jody Taylor saw the problems clearly yet creatively, exceptional children simply weren't getting the focused professional attention they required. Professional inservice training, and funds to support it, was technically available, but it didn't focus on aides. An aide could legally attend workshops for teachers if she believed she could profit from it and she didn't have to spell the absent teacher—shaky assumptions in a field given to jargon and esoteric constructions. It was clearly time for a more responsive and responsible way to improve the competencies of an often overlooked but ultimately significant group.

As they studied the problems under less than idyllic conditions, the Lunds were quickly persuaded that, court cases, administrative action, and far-reaching legislation notwithstanding, the rights of Idaho's children with handicaps were being effectively stymied, even violated, by the uneven quality of the instruction they were receiving. They reviewed test information and found themselves faced with a set of tricky dilemmas: in the the first instance, how to get at the causes of failure—by children, teachers, and aides; secondly, once there, how to figure out where they should be; and thirdly, the best means to use to get them there. One fact remained unassailable: Basically untrained aides whose main qualifications seemed to be a degree of feeling for the children and the wisdom they had accumulated on the job were often doing the toughest work in the classroom

In 1976, the Lunds began to examine the classroom performance of the special education aides of Idaho Falls. They found an intolerable rate of turnover. Some aides simply found the work unrewarding. Others failed to respect the schools' ground rules or went on to more remunerative work. Over a period of two and one-half years, the Lunds looked at 195 aides in their district and 250 in the region of which Idaho Falls is part. Their findings were hardly calculated to gladden the hearts of true believers, for they revealed a dismaying pattern of failure by the aides arising from a spectrum of causes which they ranked in this order:

- **No concept of direct instruction.** Many aides just didn't know how to work in a classroom. They didn't know how to correct a child who had erred. Their concepts of discipline were home-grown rather than developed from solid knowledge of the characteristics of children with disabilities. Problems in behavior arose where they hadn't previously existed.
- **Attitude.** Many of the aides who did poorly simply didn't like children with handicaps. In some cases, the hostility stemmed from religious or moral convictions that these children were not just different, they were inferior.
- **"Mini-teacher syndrome."** In trying to measure up to the exacting demands of a difficult job made even more difficult by their lack of training, some aides took to imitating the teacher. The perils of this kind of behavior were obvious.

These, in many different forms, were the main causes of failure by the aides the Lunds studied. There were others that clearly required attention in any scheme for training those still in the schools. Some aides tended to speak out both in and outside of class in ways, at times, and on subjects about which they had limited or no knowledge. A similar lack of judgment—or of failure, in the Lunds' opinion—was exhibited by those who violated the confidential quality of records of the children by discussing them openly, sometimes, incredibly, as a vehicle for some kind of social climbing that was important to them. Others never mastered the equipment used in the classroom or were unable to do the paper work that came with the job. Tragically, too, there were aides who never could understand what special education was all about. For all

they knew, even after some years on the job, they could have been working in a factory.

The Lunds analyzed and broke this information out, then contrasted it with the behavior and competencies of aides whose students were learning and developing effectively. The "good" aides were organized. They understood instructional practices and could correct children's mistakes while reinforcing rather than threatening them. They handled confidential matters discreetly and sensitively. The latter "competency" has unique application in Idaho, which, despite its vast girth, is really one large small town. It inspired one aide, Julie Mayer of Idaho Falls, to develop a private system of classification of and response to queries about children with disabilities:

| Classification | Response |
|---|---|
| JP - just personal | Polite, complimentary, return comment |
| PC - parent concerned | Acknowledge as positive reflection or concern |
| BB - busybody | Avoid |
| PP - prying professional (like a bill collector) | Refer to principal or other high authority. |

Armed with a finely developed sense of why some aides succeed while many fail, Debbie and Gene Lund still could not figure out why a minority of about 14 percent could not measure up. After analyzing a variety of possible causes, they decided that the central source of that failure was external. It arose from the failure of someone else—usually teacher and/or the principal—to understand the full implications of the aide's role in the special education classroom. This became a precept of the training program that was to unfold as the Lunds dissected the factors that contributed to these failures. For teachers who did not use aides effectively, the main causes were (1) general insecurity, (2) a feeling that they were being threatened by the aide, (3) inadequate training in the newer (or any) materials they were using, (4) a high ego level which kept them from accepting their need to learn, and, predictably, (5) the low level of readiness to work with anyone else in the classroom. As if this weren't enough, the Lunds also found that some teachers had unclear expectations of the aide and of her capabilities, didn't know how to instruct her, and/or sent the aide off on interminable chores or errands so that the principal would not see how badly she was using the aide.

The shortcomings of a principal who has "failed" to use paraprofessionals fall into more precisely definable categories. Some of them plainly do not know what an aide can or should do and how this person should fit into the school's scheme of things, especially in special education. The same principals are likely to misunderstand their role in the proper functioning of the team that teaches the children with disabilities and may blame the teacher for actual or imagined shortcomings. But the buck probably wouldn't stop at the teacher. The paraprofessional would inevitably receive the heat.

The Lunds' product stems from these behavioral forces and atmospheric factors. Modestly funded through the state with so-called VI funds (the training authority of U.S. Public Law 95-49, which supports approximately eight percent of Idaho's special education costs), theirs is a comprehensive 15-topic, 16-20 hour curriculum offered in four sessions over an eight-month period. Its primary emphasis is on equipping future trainers to train the aides. This is not a new concept but one that has unique applicability where the preparation of aides is concerned. One of the principal problems in this field, which the Lunds recognized almost immediately, is the dearth of "hands-on" type "master trainers" who are at the same time authoritative and experienced. Their origin or organizational affiliation—whether classroom teacher, college faculty member, imported consultant, or state official—was far less important than their ability to communicate and demonstrate effectively exactly what Idaho's special education aides needed to know. Equally vital was the involvement of the whole educational team—aide, special education teacher, principal, and, where appropriate, state or regional official. But of all of these individuals, the "master trainer" is the linchpin of the process, for it is this person who trains the trainers of the aides. If the process seems complicated, the accusation is warranted. It needs to be complex to construct the permanent base of trained trainers that so few other systems can

boast.

The Idaho Falls design, which the state education agency views as the nucleus of an eventual permanent state system, is inexpensive, thorough (the materials leave little to chance while following the principal substantive currents of other strong programs), and flexible. Although it does not yet provide for the acquisition of a college degree or credits, its authors are urging the establishment of a precisely delineated four-step career ladder comparable in most respects to the few good models in existence in 1980. Briefly, the steps are:

1. **Untrained aide** minimum wage or thereabouts — straight "off the street", hired to meet urgent needs for personnel
2. **Trained aide** ten percent above minimum wage — completed one year of training (20 classroom hours), 1,110 hours of "practicum" experience, mastery of 84 competencies
3. **Paraprofessional** 20 percent above trained aide — advanced, more experienced version of trained aide
4. **Paraprofessional Specialist** 30-75 percent more than paraprofessional — specialized in one or more disabilities or exceptionally qualified generalist

# Where Does It Lead?

It's hard but wonderful work. I'd stay in it forever if I thought there was any hope of advancement. After six years here they hired a new aide without a minute of experience. Fine. The more help the better. She makes just about what I do but can't do half the work or handle any of the really difficult children I do. I think she'll be OK in time, but what kind of business is it where experience and training mean so little? I keep growing on the job, but nothing happens. No advancement. No change.

Paraprofessional in an
Illinois elementary school, 1980

In the early and mid 1970's the number of school systems that had anything resembling a three- or four-step instructional career ladder for paraprofessionals in special (or any kind of) education could be counted in double digits—and not very many, at that. Officials in many of the others contended that they had some kind of career advancement plan, but few could provide specific details when asked about location, scope, or financial rewards.

The answers to these three questions were as discouraging in 1980 as they must have been nearly a decade earlier: "almost nowhere" for the first two and "precious little" for the third. And there is little reason to believe that the link between in-service training and advancement was appreciably closer as the 1980's began than it was in the early 1970's.

In-service training should ideally represent both a normal state of affairs and a kind of incentive for those who receive it. Lamentably, in most professional settings it is so wanting when judged by either or both criteria as to have little effect upon the aide's career.

What about career ladders—planned, marked steps toward advancement? Do they have any status, or is the concept still largely rhetorical or hortatory? Do or should they tie in with training? Are they the business of the agencies and institutions that train education aides, or are they matters for agencies, unions, and the profession at large? Are there other, better ways to recognize and reward aides who have learned and can do more on their job?

Here the answers are blurry. In principle there should be tangible recognition, something far beyond a certificate or a degree, to attest to the changes that training brings. It simply cannot suffice to talk about inner satisfaction or psychic reward. Told that aides completing a set of arduous after-hours training workshops over a nine-month period would participate in a public ceremony spotlighting their achievement, an aide in Montana said: "Thanks anyway. I think I'll go home and fix supper for the kids."

The cynicism is understandable. Recognition is rare and rewards rarer. The only certain path to advancement for a paraprofessional in special education is to become a teacher, and even at that level employment is by no means certain. To take that route connotes dissatisfaction with the role of aide—a false message from people who like what they do and usually have neither the desire nor the tools to leave their "track." It is also an admission that the education of children with handicaps is a growth industry for everyone but the people who may work the hardest and suffer the most with them.

If there is hope that incentives may one day materialize, it will probably originate in various combinations of these imperatives:

- **The growing complexity and demands of the field on the teacher**—a circumstance that eventually will lead to the creation of a corps of trained subprofessional skilled workers whose presence in the special education classroom finally will be considered indispensible. Once enough thoroughly trained aides are in the schools, and administrators (who remain peculiarly

insensitive to them) honestly recognize their worth, tangible reward should follow.

- **The turnover rate among trained aides**—spotty up to now, but likely to increase as wages, status and job security rise in cognate fields such as mental health, physical therapy, sign language interpreting, and technology, among others. Although the training of special education aides is too recent a development to assess accurately in these terms, it is conceivable that freshly trained aides may pick up and head for more remunerative, prestigious, and secure fields where their training would have some credibility.
- **Unionization of aides**—a growing, but still unfocussed possibility that could yield important benefits, lead to a degree of bureaucratization, or both. Aides are organized in some locales. The process of unionization does encourage the development of career ladders, and, although it perhaps tends to emphasize seniority more strongly than competence, it invariably assures higher wages. But the unions themselves have not campaigned extensively among the aides who, for their part, seldom represent cohesive, organizable groupings. There may only be two or three special education aides in a school building. It is not easy to overcome this fragmentation.
- **The establishment of statewide standards**—the escalating movement, despite a pronounced lack of anything resembling agreed definition, toward state certification of aides. With the strong caveat that the definitional range is enormous, it is heartening to note that in 1979 eight states (Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Ohio and Vermont) had procedures for certification for all aides; two (Kansas and Wisconsin, with Louisiana almost there) demanded certification or permits for special education aides; and eight (Idaho, Iowa, Illinois, Mississippi, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas) had various kinds of administrative guidelines. Unfortunately, "certification" may in some states be available to the holder of a birth certificate and a library card. In Louisiana, however, Assistant Superintendent Henry Smith is overseeing an effort, mandated in state legislation, to develop a state-wide training model and system of permits according to competencies. Paralleling and linked to this possible breakthrough in state-level attention to special education aides is the development of an "interim" training plan by the state education agency and Louisiana State University.
- **The growth of two-year degree-yielding programs in both two- and four-year colleges**—a development that, whatever its strengths and shortcomings, "locates" the training of aides as a college-level affair. Many of the nearly 100 post-secondary institutions that offer the training have little contact with the schools and agencies in which the aides work. And the local education agencies are frequently oblivious to the existence of a reputable program just down the road. Some training models have nothing to do with the school's needs. Others are almost literally owned by a sponsoring school system. What matters most in this context, though, is not possession or context but the raw fact that the programs are viewed by policy-makers as legitimate areas of post-secondary instruction.

The analyst may take a different cut at the issue of incentives and rewards for training, one that reflects neither a trend nor a measurable sign but, instead, a fact of life in educational policymaking. Simply put, special education aides in particular, and all classroom aides in general, are not high on the urgent, "must do" priorities of the nation's educational decision-makers. As we have seen, they appear almost nowhere in state legislation. Almost alone among school people, they are not organized, either as a movement or a professional association. Their affairs are rarely discussed in widely circulated—or any—publications beyond narrowly specialized, low circulation journals. When the stray

articulate advocate of their cause appeals for more support, the answer often is that one or another of what the Council for Basic Education calls "the educations"—consumers', career, community, metric, drivers', drug abuse, environmental, or whatever—has been there first and blotted up whatever liquid capital was lying around. There are many ways to confront the dilemmas of non-support or invisible priority. All but one—the solid development of professional standards—are properly beyond the field of vision of this effort to describe how paraprofessionals are or should be prepared.

Whatever the administrative terms used to describe the upward or even lateral movement of aides—career advancement, career ladders, or lattices, most with ascending or descending, often pretentious, designations and roman numerals—all connote potential upward mobility, a characteristic of virtually all organized human endeavor. Some of the main features of efforts to address the problem of advancement for aides in special education:

- **Differentiation among tasks, and therefore among qualified people performing them, is much easier in residential facilities than in schools.** On a broader canvas, other fields in the human services can create ladders in which graduates of four-year colleges are considered to be paraprofessionals, albeit "advanced" or "intermediate" ones. Their scope and fields of action are simply broader and their flexibility therefore greater.
- **The distinctions are described by bureaucrats**—a virtue in that they are usually sharp and clearly calibrated, but an impediment when their cumbersome language comes before political decision-makers.
- **Training agencies have trouble enough launching new programs.** To expect them to key their curricula to the internal hierarchical requirements of a school system, a state hospital, and a half dozen other differently sponsored public care centers may be asking too much.
- **Terminology differs among systems.** A four-step process in Idaho may differ drastically from one in a nearby state. That state may have no ladder, and the "paraprofessional specialist" who moves there may have to start all over again. Worse still, the new state may have no system; if current data are valid, the trained newcomer would no longer be part of a system of career development.
- **In some places where ladders do exist they are paper exercises.** They provide a mechanism for slightly improved salaries, but the aides almost always do the same work. Too, gradations of task within a small group must be sensitively handled. It is one thing to have Activity Therapists I, II, and III at the large Kansas Neurological Institute in Topeka; it is quite another to have one "trained aide" and one "paraprofessional" at a small school in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, or Limerick, Maine.

These are caveats and limitations, not arguments against career ladders. They still represent the single best form for recognizing that special education paraprofessionals are doing their job effectively, that their training means something, and that they have mobility in their corner of the human services. The latter concern, more social or "socioeconomic" than professional or educational, has been one of the principal forces behind the evolution of career ladders. It remains a valid and persuasive argument in their favor.

There are many models of career ladders, but only one organization, the New Careers Training Laboratory, has attempted to codify and to relate them to professions beyond special education, and to construct a prototypical, all-purpose design. A finely tuned set of precise steps, the NCTL ladder is sufficiently comprehensive for adoption *in toto*, reduction or contraction, or, depending upon local, special, or administrative requirements, expansion. Described in two NCTL publications—Frances J. Dory and Anna Lou Pickett, "Task Analysis for Paraprofessionals Working with Severely/Profoundly Handicapped Children and in 'Mainstream' Classrooms and Career Ladders and Lattices for Paraprofessionals in Special Education," and "Career Ladders and a Training Model for the (Re)Training of Direct Service Workers in Community Based Programs for the Developmentally Disabled"—its key steps and main features are:

# CAREER LADDER
# for
# PARAPROFESSIONALS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

**CAREER LADDER STEP I**

*Job Title:* SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSISTANT

*Entry Requirements:*

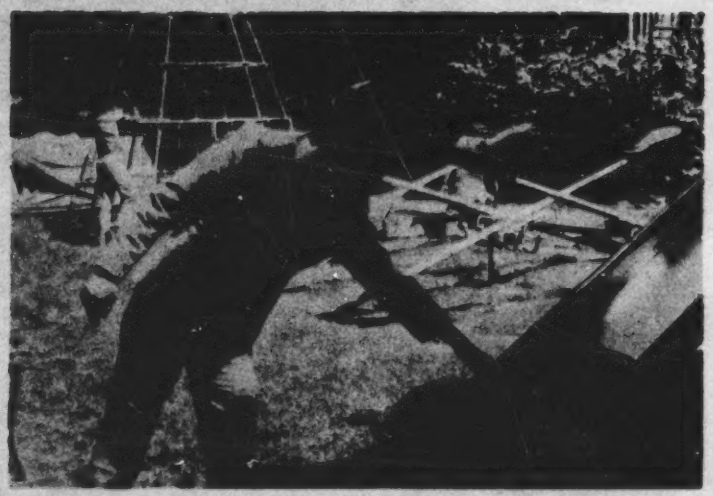
Previous experience as a teacher aide to a regular teacher and in-service training including courses on exceptional children and classroom behavior management.

*General Requirements:*

Assists the special education teacher in instruction, recreation, classroom organization and maintenance, record-keeping, physical care of children, and home/community relations.

*Specific Duties:*

1. Assists the classroom teacher by *reviewing* and *reinforcing* lessons initiated by the classroom teacher with individuals and small groups of children. Examples:
   - reading stories aloud
   - counting of objects
   - reinforcing recognition of the sounds of letters, etc.
2. Prepares instructional materials and helps set up, operate, and maintain instructional equipment and aids. Examples:
   - operate ditto machine
   - prepare a health corner, mini-library, art center
   - set up gross motor equipment.



3. Performs necessary classroom routines and clerical work such as daily attendance book, pupil records, anecdotal histories, office records, storing and maintaining materials and aids.

4. Participates in weekly and long-range planning with the teacher on specific programs for individual children. Examples:
   - observation of particular children in a specific area
   - activities in a child's or group's particular sensory and/or perceptual area
   - allocating particular talents for instructing specific children.

5. Supervises small groups or individual children in specialized programs while the teacher works with another child or a group of children. Examples:
   - particular activities of Stern math program
   - gross motor exercises
   - tape recording of reading.

*Supervisory Control:*

Directly responsible to the classroom teacher for all tasks. The Special Education Supervisor and/or principal of the school have ultimate responsibility for the conduct and implementation of all activities of a school program.

*Evaluation Criteria:*

Based on direct observation, conferences, and written summaries a school district could possibly draw up a formal evaluation form or leave the written summary to the teacher. The evaluation should be done by the teacher, supervisor, and principal, if possible. Progress should be given weekly and a formal written summary quarterly.

*Advancement Criteria:*

Advancement to the position of SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATE is dependent on the following:

- one year of in-service training
- one year of accredited college work
- one semester of supervised work in a special classroom
- demonstrated commitment, empathy, and expertise in working with children.

**CAREER LADDER STEP II**

*Job Title:* SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATE

*Entry Requirements:*

One year of in-service training of which one semester must be in a special classroom. Also, one year of accredited college work with a major in special education.

*General Requirements:*

Provides assistance to the special education teacher in the areas of instruction, engages in joint planning with the special education teacher, and performs activities independently with children.

*Specific Duties:*

1. Assists the classroom teacher by *reviewing* and *reinforcing* lessons initiated by the classroom teacher with individual and small groups of children.
2. Participates in weekly, daily, and long-range planning with the teacher on specific programs for individual children. Planning determines aspects of the program that can be carried out independently.
3. Instructs small groups or individual children in specific lessons outlined by the special education teacher, or in particular specialized programs (i.e., lesson in Distar, SRA, etc.). Examples:
   - initiate and instruct in an art lesson
   - conduct a formal lesson in Stern math, SRA
   - work on a self-care skill with a child.
4. Assists the special education teacher, through resource room model, in the delivery of educational instructional services to children who have been "mainstreamed."
5. Designs instructional materials for inclusion in particular individual programs of children with handicaps. Examples:
   - games
   - ditto sheets
   - stories.
6. Demonstrates to parents of children with disabilities activities that can be done with their children at home.
7. Maintain communication with parents of children and other residents and personnel in schools as determined by classroom teacher.

*Supervisory Control:*

Same as for SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSISTANT

*Evaluation Criteria:*

Same as for SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSISTANT

*Advancement Criteria:*

Advancement to the position of SPECIAL EDUCATION TECHNICIAN depends on the following:

- two years of in-service training
- two years of accredited college work or an associate degree in special education
- demonstrated commitment, empathy, and expertise in working with children with handicapping conditions.

**CAREER LADDER STEP III**

*Job Title:* SPECIAL EDUCATION TECHNICIAN

*Entry Requirements:*

Associate degree in special education or two years of college work. In addition, two years of in-service training, one of which must have been in a special class with children with handicaps.

*General Requirements:*

Works and plans jointly with the special education teacher. Designs and instructs independently, but receives technical assistance from the special education teacher. Responsible for taking part in seminars and special demonstrations to improve skills in special education.

*Specific Duties:*

1. Plans individual programs for children with handicaps as specified by the special education teacher in particular instructional areas.
2. Selects particular areas of the curriculum and assumes responsibility for the instruction of that area to children in the class.
3. Assists the special education teacher in conducting workshops and seminars in special education for regular teachers, parents, and other personnel.
4. Participates in special workshops and seminars leading to skills in specialized areas (i.e., Monterey Language Program, Distar, Peabody Language Program).
5. Plans and designs instructional programs with the special education teacher on a weekly and long-range basis.
6. Demonstrates activities to parents of these children that could be carried out at home.
7. Attends and participates in conference and meetings on progress of individual children.
8. Delivers instructional services to those children who have been "mainstreamed."

*Supervisory Control:*

Same as for previous categories

*Evaluation Criteria:*

Same as for previous categories

*Advancement Criteria:*

Advancement to the position of SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERN depends on the following:

- three years of in-service training
- three years of accredited college work, or an associate degree in special education plus one year of college work
- demonstrated commitment, empathy, and expertise in working with children with handicapping conditions.

**CAREER LADDER STEP IV**

*Job Title:* SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERN

*Entry Requirements:*

Three years of college work and two years of in-service training, two of which must have been in special education.

*General Requirements:*

Responsible for designing a unit of instruction and instructing a group of children or the entire class of children with assistance and approval by special education teacher. Responsible for taking part in seminars and special demonstrations to improve skills.

*Specific Duties:*

1. Designs and instructs units of instruction for group or entire class of children with handicaps, with approval of special education teacher.
2. Assists the special education teacher in conducting workshops and seminars in special education for regular teachers, parents, and other personnel.
3. Participates in conferences, team meetings, and school functions of professional concern.
4. Conducts progress meetings with parents of the children.
5. Delivers instructional services to those children who have been "mainstreamed." Designs the unit of instruction for these children with final approval from teacher.
6. Gives in-service instruction to paraprofessionals interested in special education programs.
7. Attends special seminars to obtain special skills (e.g., Monterey Language Program, Distar, Peabody Language Program).

*Supervisory Control:*

Same as for other categories

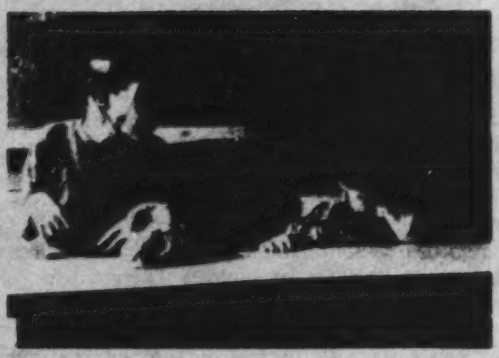
*Evaluation Criteria:*

Same as for other categories

*Advancement Criteria:*

Advancement to the position of SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER depends on the following:

- four years of in-service training
- Master's degree in special education.



# Starting Up: Some Propositions and Cautions

The cases and circumstances described in this report are typical only of themselves. There is no average setting for training aides. There are, however, certain common features and cautions that designers of training programs should consider before embarking upon this path.

**Emphasize the in- rather than pre-service character of the training.** Whatever form or style a program adopts, admission to it should be as open as possible. The only cause for exclusion of an actual or potential aide should be demonstrated unwillingness to participate—and even that criterion shouldn't be too rigidly applied. In the real world, though, the over-powering need is to train those already in the field who may find themselves overwhelmed by new demands, technology, and relationships. Training programs must center on their needs. Fortunately, this is an issue that usually resolves itself. Few future aides, knowing that they are entering a minimum wage field and that training may be available

to them free or at low cost after they begin their work, are likely (or able) to dig into their own pockets to sample the available course. But sponsoring training agencies are well-advised not to recruit new, unemployed students too assiduously. As a source of supply, they are by definition undependable.

**Make sure that the aides want training and involve them in designing it.** Any local survey of paraprofessionals is likely to produce strong sentiment for training; these are responsible and realistic people who want to do their jobs well. Far less certain is their reaction to the specific features of a program. Would they undertake it on their own time on a non-reimbursable basis? How far would they travel for courses, demonstrations, or off-site "practicum" experiences? Are they eligible to receive academic credit and degrees? Do they want them? Or would a series of site-based workshops be just as effective? Do they have the time for reading, or should the training be packaged without texts or outside assignments? A simply constructed canvass would reveal much, cost little, and help originators of training programs to avoid unexpected roadblocks.

**Work with neighbors who share your goals and values.** It is always tempting to probe the unknown independently, but the net yield of such exploration may turn out to be the rediscovery of fire. It is possible that a nearby agency—perhaps not primarily concerned with education but rather with mental health, developmental disabilities, criminal justice, or another field—has already designed a program to meet the needs of its own paraprofessionals and can adapt it for special education aides. No one needs new organizations, and a new field should, above all, avoid duplicating what others are already doing. This is obviously more valid in Baltimore than in Strawberry Junction, which may be innocent of serious involvement in providing human services, but one could probably find overlap or costly duplication of effort in any community in the nation. More simply put, use what's there. Try to stick with the generic agencies, at least until a new capacity proves to be much more effective.

**Accept the maxim that "variety is the spice of life."** No endeavor to train special education paraprofessionals should be: (1) located in one place and one alone, (2) based exclusively or largely on textbooks, (3) keyed to specified academic credentials of the students, (4) conducted without direct exposure to sites different from those at which the aides work, or (5) without specific goals. The paraprofessional students should know what to expect, but they should be prepared for a diverse diet, including some unexpected (but carefully planned) turns in their training. Their exposure during training should include the off-beat—encounters with experts from outside of education, mental health or developmental disabilities; visits to settings totally different from those in which they work; sessions with parents, lobbyists, legislators, and other decision-makers; and experiences that the student would not normally undergo in an in-service program.

**Set an "intellectual" level and stick to it.** Some paraprofessionals are conversant with the great currents of social and literary history, while others are only functionally literate. The obvious tactic is to split the difference and direct the level of training to the middle. But the obvious tactic is wrong. There is no top, bottom or middle. There are only paraprofessionals who are sharing an identical professional and training experience. Whatever materials, lectures or technology are used should be judged on their merits, specifically whether and how much their content will help children with handicaps. The aide who may work hardest to understand a seemingly simple text may easily master complicated technology, and vice versa. The ultimately satisfactory intellectual level, then, is the common ground on which the paraprofessionals meet, and no designer of training curricula or presenter of training should consciously seek to talk up, down, or to a great middle.

**Establish realistic expectations for all aspects of the training.** The single unassailable fact about paraprofessionals who work with children with disabilities is that they are destined not to acquire material wealth or exalted professional positions from their careers as aides. Their training is an exercise of nearly fundamental altruism often performed in difficult settings and with few goals beyond the hope that it will yield better performance by aides and children. To present it as anything else is misleading. As the field develops, training may well lead to various levels of certification, higher or different rungs on career

advancement ladders or transfer lattices, increased pay, or more responsible and different work. And, depending on the state of the local scene, the aides will readily understand the odds that any of these will materialize. Some, however, may regard the training as a stepping stone to instant professional status or, conversely, may believe that presumed failure to do well in it could endanger their current position. Setting clear, realistic goals will inevitably help to create a healthy, nonthreatening atmosphere free of the pressures of competition or insecurity.

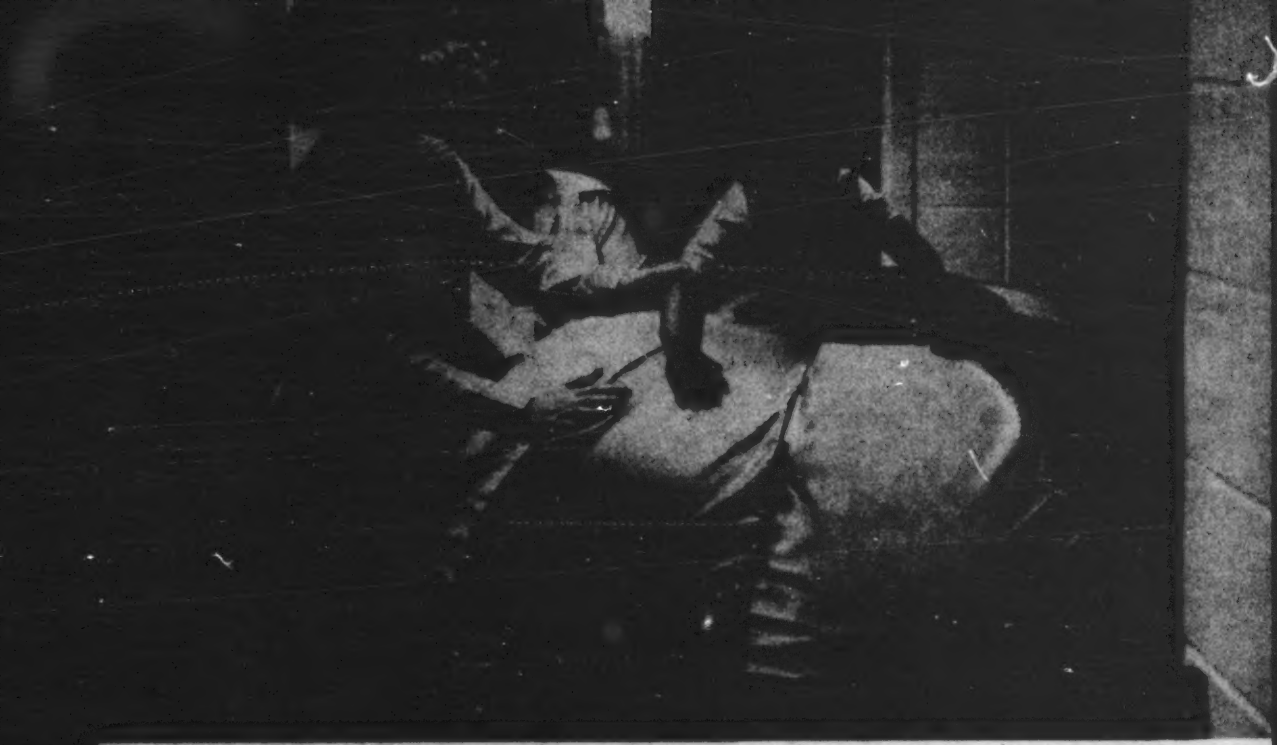
**Try to generate support from several sources, especially local ones.** Some of the most effective educational programs in the country owe their success to collaborations of individuals, groups, agencies, and special interests. While one individual from one organization depending on one source of financial support can, and often does, carry off a dynamic, high-quality program, the effort could become personalized. Too, it has a narrow resource base and runs a serious risk of termination when the individual moves on or the main funding source dries up. The people and organizations who make up a more broadly based consortium-type training enterprise usually share a sense of common ownership and participatory management. This is especially important in programs to prepare aides because their work is usually community-oriented, and local involvement can only create greater understanding of the problems and potential of children with handicaps. But even in a cooperative arrangement, there must be a single designated leader who assumes responsibility.

**Define the scope of training but try to avoid excessive specialization.** The aide working with hearing-impaired, blind, cerebral palsied or other children with specific disabilities gravitate naturally to instruction that responds directly to the needs of these children. Often it is the only kind of preparation available, and the limitation simply defines the paraprofessional's professional range, at least as far as formal training goes. In settings where training can go beyond the occasional precisely targeted workshop, though, it is essential to try to broaden and deepen the aides understanding of exceptionality, child psychology, community resources, and other subjects that help a classroom aide become a genuine instructional paraprofessional. When a community college trains aides, whatever their specialty, it should guarantee that certain basic, generalizable subject areas will receive attention even though the primary emphasis of the overall program may be finite. This is essential both to produce better-rounded aides and to enhance the credibility of the field.

**Keep political fences in good repair.** The field is entering an era of growth. There will be state-level standards, and perhaps, a national (not federal) consensus on basic competencies, certification, and other measures of employment and performance. Increased financial support, largely as seed or starter money, may be coming to locations from the states. It is almost predictable that some states will bungle or abdicate their responsibilities unless trainers and believers keep their feet to the fire, intelligently and diplomatically. The field and its practitioners cannot operate in isolation. Developing and maintaining a constructive "watching-brief" in the circles of policy-making at any level of public policy is not difficult. The decision-makers usually welcome it, and, it is unfortunately safe to say, they know much too little about paraprofessionals and the special world they inhabit.

Fragmented and of mixed quality though it may be, a movement is under way. Sometimes it appears to lack focus despite the efforts of its early leaders to define it. While the cause of preparing classroom aides has not yet captured a high rung on the agenda of education's movers and shakers, it has at least begun to matter where children with handicaps are. It will inevitably grow, deservedly so, and its products, special education's trained paraprofessionals, will make a strong, if chronically undervalued, contribution to helping some of the nation's most deserving children.

As the movement to improve the performance of the paraprofessionals gains momentum, it is as predictable as tomorrow's dawn that new trainers will make old mistakes. Some will begin programs without proper backing. Others will force outdated, jargon-laden texts on working people. Small programs will try to serve large populations and *vice versa.* Administrative rigidities will doom highly motivated endeavors, and so on *ad infinitum.* But in some places, there will be a workable convergence of forces—needs, support, creative direction, good materials—and success will come.



## RESOURCES

*ASSIST: Associate Instructional Support for Teachers*; ASSIST I: The Moderately/Severely Handicapped, ASSIST II: Mildly Handicapped/Mainstreaming, ASSIST III: Preschool; each unit consists of a Teacher's Guide, a Sourcebook for Instructional Associates, and either a film or filmstrips; Developmental Training Center, 2853 East Tenth Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47401.

*Guildelines for the Training, Utilization, & Supervision of Paraprofessionals & Aides*; and the *Facilitator Model*; Kansas State Department of Education, 120 East 10th Street, Topeka, Kansas 66612.

*Toward Quality Programming: Paraprofessional Involvement in Individual Education Programming* by Mary-Beth Fafard; New Careers Training Laboratory, CASE/CUNY, 33 West 42nd St., Room 1217, New York, NY 10036. (1980).

*The Vital Link: Paraprofessionals and the Education of Handicapped Children*, 1979, by George R. Kaplan; New Careers Training Laboratory.

*Paraprofessionals in Special Education: The State of the Art*, 1979, by Anna Lou Pickett, New Careers Training Laboratory.

*Career Ladders and a Training Model for the (Re)training of Direct Service Workers in Community Based Programs for the Developmentally Disabled*, 1979, New Careers Training Laboratory.

*Paraprofessional Bibliography*: Training Materials, Resources and Programs for Paraprofessionals Working in Educational Programs for Persons With Handicapping Conditions, 1980, New Careers Training Laboratory

*Task Analysis for Paraprofessionals Working With Severely/Profoundly Handicapped Children and in "Mainstream" Classrooms* and *Career Ladders and Lattices for Paraprofessionals in Special Education*, 1977, by Frances J. Dory and Anna Lou Pickett, New Careers Training Laboratory.

"What State Laws (Texas, Louisiana and Kansas) Say About Paraprofessionals," in *New Directions*, The Newsletter of the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Special Education, Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 1979, New Careers Training Laboratory.

*A Handbook for Paraprofessional Training*: Early Childhood Special Education, 1978, Sinclair Community College, Dayton, Ohio.

*Workshop for Special Education Aides*, 1979, by Deborah and Gene Lund, 346 Carol, Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401.

*Coordinated Training Services for Direct-Service Staff in Community Based Programs for Developmentally Disabled Persons in Nebraska*, 1980, by Karen Faison, The Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Institute, University of Nebraska Medical Center, 444 South 44th Street, Omaha, Nebraska 68131.

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